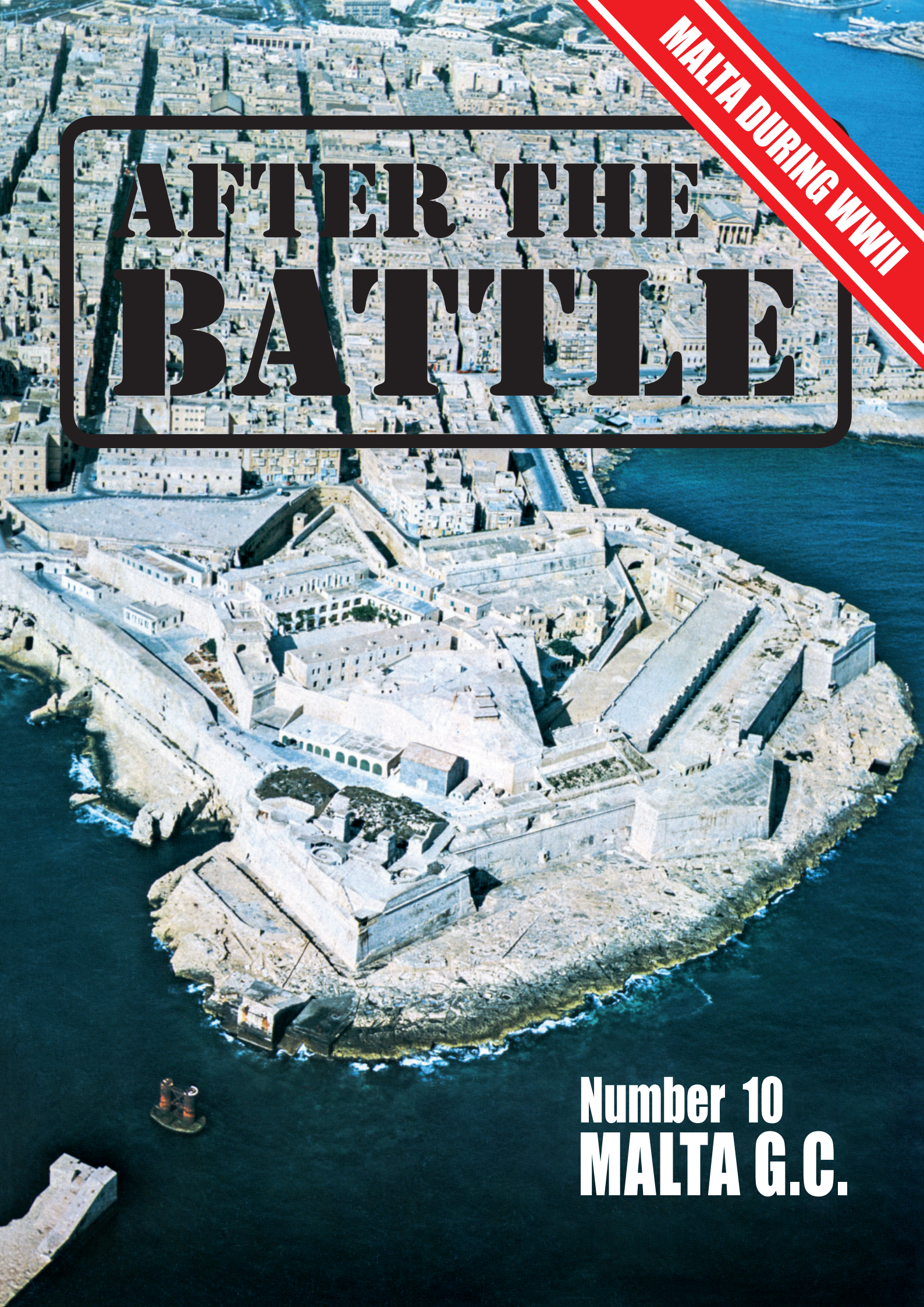
MALTA DURING WWII
AFTER THE
BATTLE
Number 10
MALTA G.C.

# NUMBER 10

**Edited by Winston G. Ramsey**
**Published by**
**Battle of Britain International Ltd.,**
**Church House, Church Street,**
**London E15 3JA, England**
**Telephone: (020) 8534 8833**
**Fax: (020) 8555 7567**
**E-mail: (afterthebattle@mcmail.com)**
**Web site:**
**(www.afterthebattle.mcmail.com)**
**Printed in Great Britain by**
**Trafford Print Colour Ltd.,**
**Shaw Wood Way, Doncaster DN2 5TB.**

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**After the Battle** is published on the 15th of February, May, August and November.
**United Kingdom Newsagent Distribution:**
Lakeside Publishing Services Ltd, Unit 1D,
Tideway Industrial Estate, Kirtling Street,
London SW8 5BP
**United States Distribution and Subscriptions:**
RZM Imports, PO Box 995, Southbury, CT, 06488
Telephone: 1-203-264-0774
Toll Free: 1-800-661-6136
Website: (www.rzm.com)
**Canadian Distribution and Subscriptions:**
Vanwell Publishing Ltd., PO Box 2131,
1 Northrup Crescent,
St. Catharines, Ontario L2R 7S2.
Telephone: (905) 937 3100 Fax: (905) 937 1760
E-mail: (sales@vanwell.com)

This issue distributed in **Malta** by: Audio Visual Centre Limited, 8 Tagliaferro Centre, High Street, Sliema.
Telephone: 30886


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**Front Cover**: Valletta, capital of Malta, with Fort St. Elmo and the site of the bridge damaged in the Italian Naval attack on the Harbour in the foreground.

**Centre pages**: The M5 International half-track personnel carrier restored in Sicilian invasion colours by the Logistics Unit of the Armed Forces of Malta.

**Back Cover**: Gladiator N5520 'Faith' after its restoration at RAF Luqa.


The editor is indebted to the following authors and publishers: The Air Battle of Malta includes extracts from *Faith, Hope and Charity* by Kenneth Poolman, William Kimber (reissued 1974 by George Mann) and *One Man's Window* by Denis Barnham, William Kimber (also Nel Paperback edition 1975).

Flight Lieutenant Ian Smith based on *Anatomy of a Rebel* by Peter Joyce, Graham Publishing, Salisbury, with additional material and photographs with thanks to the Ministry of Information, Salisbury, Rhodesia.

The Dam Busters—photographs by courtesy of EMI Studios Ltd., Elstree.

**ISSN: 0306-154X**

# MALTA G.C.

**Top: The red flag is raised on the Palace lookout tower warning of an impending air attack (IWM). Above: Our 1975 reconstruction on the same tower. Opposite top: At the height of the attack in April 1942, bombs fall in the water and on Manoel Island, British submarine base (IWM). Right: The dome of the new church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel dominates the same view today.**

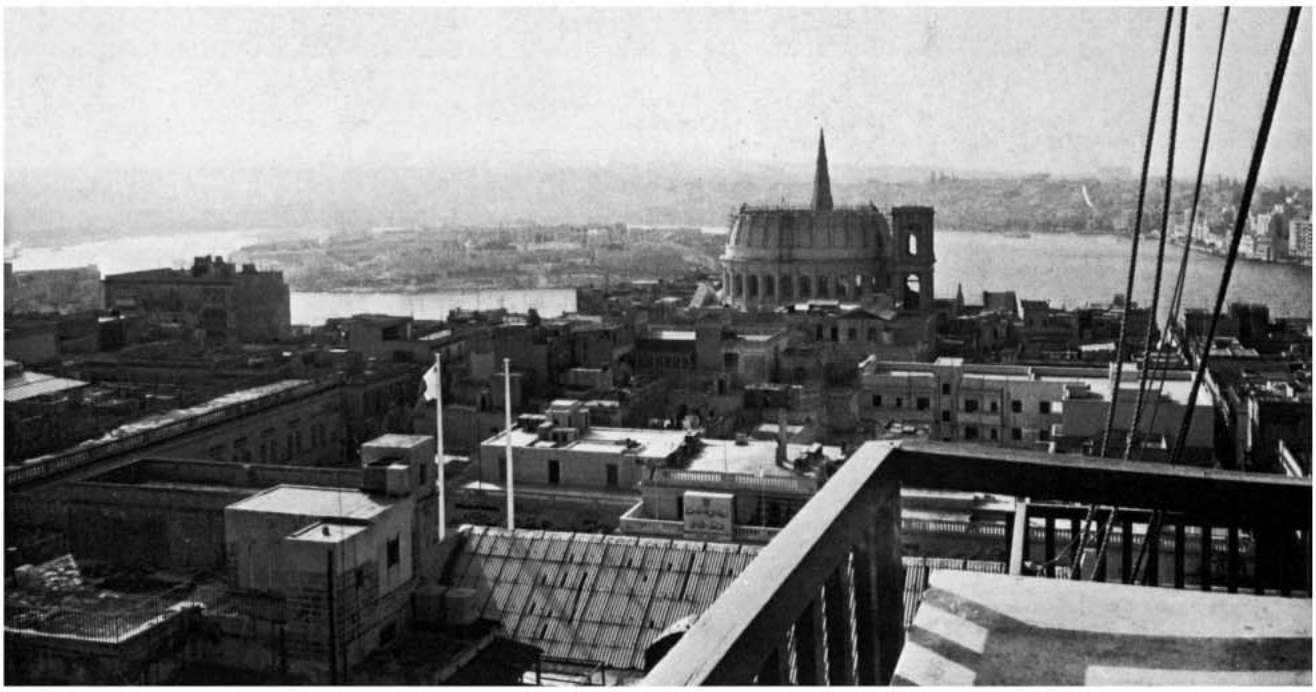
At the outbreak of war with Germany in September 1939, responsibility for the Mediterranean was divided between the British and French forces; the British in the east at Alexandria and west at Gibraltar and France, with bases at Bizerta, Algiers and Oran, covering the centre.

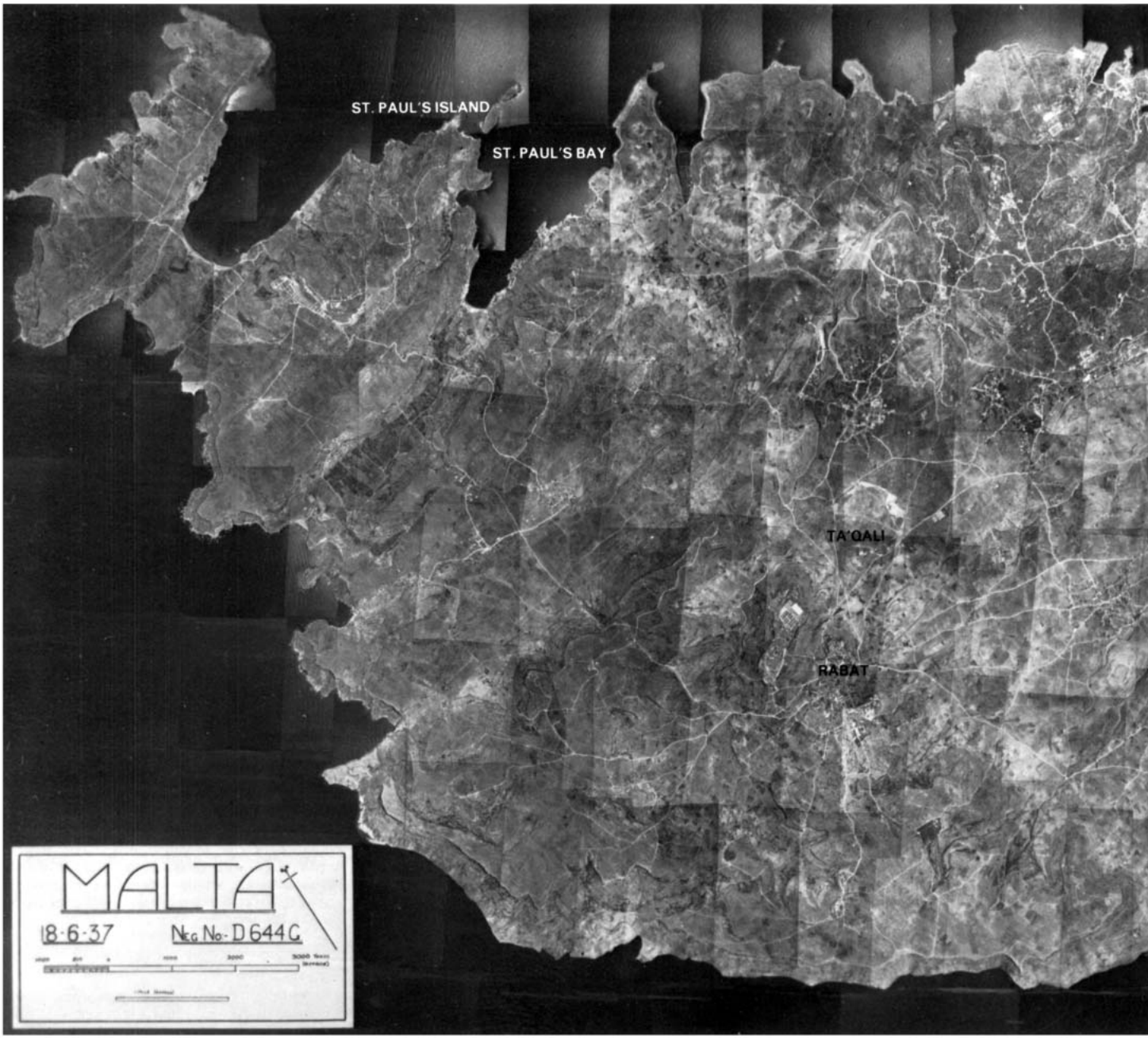
The strategic importance of Malta in the centre of the Mediterranean, a British naval base since 1814, was acknowledged, but also appreciated were the problems of supply and defence as only sixty miles of sea separated it from Italian bases in Sicily.

In the summer of 1939, the Committee of Imperial Defence had approved a long-term air defence programme for the island consisting of four squadrons of fighters and 172 anti-aircraft guns. This programme had not yet been put into operation when Air Commodore F. H. M. Maynard arrived on the island in January 1940 as the new Air Officer Commanding RAF Mediterranean. During the following months, Air Commodore Maynard and Admiral Cunningham, Naval Commander-in-Chief, based at Lascaris barracks in Valletta, realised that if Italy entered the war, they would be at the mercy of Italian bombers.

With the German blitzkreig successes of May 1940, Mussolini's attitude changed. His navy was greater than the British Naval forces available in the Mediterranean. His Regia Aeronautica, with bases on both sides of the Mediterranean, could cover, as Mussolini proudly boasted, the whole of the ancient Roman Empire.

On the day the German armies crossed the River Seine in France, June 10, 1940, Italy declared war on Britain and France.






# Airfields

On an island only seventeen miles by nine, land for airfields was a problem. Apart from flying-boat facilities in Marsaxlokk Bay at the south-eastern tip of the island, later augmented by two alternative alighting areas, St. Paul's Bay and the Grand Harbour, there were three airfields in existence in September 1939.

## HAL FAR

Hal Far, a grass field at an altitude of 250 ft. adjoining the RAF station at Kalafrana, had been first used in the 1920s by carrier-based aircraft as a shore base. In 1929 it was officially opened as Royal Air Force Station Hal Far. A Station Flight was created, aircraft being Fairey 3Fs and Flycatchers augmented from time to time by carrier aircraft. With the Abyssinian crisis of 1935, Hawker Demons and Wildebeeste aircraft arrived but when Air Commodore Maynard took charge in January 1940 he found the total strength consisted of four Swordfish aircraft and a radio-controlled Queen-Bee.

The stony surface at Hal Far was liable to become waterlogged during wet weather. Four flight paths were possible:

| | |
|---|---|
| N-S | 600 yards |
| E-W | 650 yards |
| NE-SW | 600 yards |
| NW-SE | 1200 yards |

The E-W flight path was extended by January 1941 to 900 yards. A year later the NE-SW runway had been increased to 1100 x 200 yards, and extensions were under way for the N-S and E-W flight paths to be completed by October 1941. Widths varied from 150 to 200 yards. Instruction had been given in October 1941 to further increase the NW-SE strip to 2000 yards as the airfield was still unsuitable for use by bombers. All installations were sited on the northern corner. These were barracks, offices and quarters, wireless and direction finding stations, flight shed, Bellman hangar and a transportable hangar. Later a torpedo store was located on the north-west corner together with petrol storage for 12,000 gallons. The bomb store was at the southern end of the NE/SW strip.

## TA'QALI

Ta'Qali airfield had been laid down on the bed of an ancient lake situated on the flat cultivated plain which stretches between Rabat and Valletta. Pre-war it had been used by civil airlines, but its grassy surface, like Hal Far, deteriorated quickly in bad weather.

The Maltese name Ta'Qali was soon changed by the RAF to Taqali and then Takali. At an altitude of 350 ft., the surface of the field had a slight slope from NE-SW, the grass-covered surface becoming baked earth in the summer. Flight paths were laid out as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| N-S | 850 yards |
| E-W | 1100 yards |
| NE-SW | 850 yards |
| NW-SE | 980 yards |

The NW-SE runway was extended early in 1941 to 1200 yards. Its width, however, remained at only 150 yards compared with 300 yards for the other directions.

A Bellman hangar and offices were situated at the south-eastern corner and four double aircraft shelters were cut in the hillside on the northern boundary.

A montage of vertical aerial photographs taken by Flight Lieutenant George Burges on June 18, 1937.

## LUQA

Luqa had been designed to overcome the bad weather restrictions of the other two airfields and was laid down as a bomber airfield. It had been built on high ground, 250 ft. above sea level, a mile and a half inland from Grand Harbour. It was intended that proper runways should be constructed to make it an all-weather aerodrome. The whole site had been levelled from hills and quarries, the latter, which abound in Malta, providing natural building materials.

Flight-Lieutenant George Burges, one of Malta's 'few', performed the first landing at Luqa in a Swordfish in June 1939.

There were three main runways:

| | |
|---|---|
| E-W | 1100 yards |
| NE-SW | 1200 yards |
| NW-SE | 1200 yards |

Each of the above had an 850 x 50 yard strip of tarmac. An additional unsurfaced runway ran 1100 yards from north to south. By 1941 this had also been tarmaced for 800 yards. Extension of the NE-SW runway to 1400 yards was under way, to be completed by the end of April. The NW-SE runway, which by December 1940 had been extended to 1400 yards, was also due for further extension by April 1941 to 1740 yards, tarmac all the way. It was estimated that the airfield would then be able to handle 24 Wellington bombers.

The aerodrome installations were sited in the angle formed by the NE-SW and NW-SE runways and consisted of six Bellman hangars, with barracks, offices and petrol store to the rear. The bomb dump was located at the south-eastern corner of the aerodrome and machine-gun posts incorporated in the perimeter.

## MARSA RACE COURSE

An emergency landing ground was prepared on Marsa Race Course at the south-western end of Grand Harbour. The race course, covering an area of 1300 x 500 yards, could only be used by aircraft not requiring long runs such as Marylands. No servicing facilities were provided, neither was fuel and oil available on site.

## SAFI

It was important that as much food as possible should be grown on Malta itself to ease the importation of foodstuff, and every available piece of land was cultivated by the farmers. This made the extension of the airfields difficult and curtailed the dispersal of aircraft. Air Commodore Maynard could foresee that the airfields would become a prime bombing target and he tackled aircraft dispersal in a unique way. The road between Luqa and Hal Far airfields was converted into a taxi-way along which branch tracks led to numerous pens built of loose rock. The work of building this dispersal strip, which was to prove vital to the survival of the aircraft in the severe bombing of 1942, was started by the Malta Police Force. Later the Hampshire Regiment continued the work and the pens were strengthened and improved with earth-filled petrol cans and stone from bombed buildings. Although each pen was numbered, difficulty was experienced by new pilots finding their way around. An interesting anecdote was recorded by Denis Barnham, a Spitfire pilot in Malta during the height of the battle:

'Last Saturday there was a raid coming in. Not only had I a long way to taxi, but I had to taxi fast to reach the runway and take off before the coolant temperature of my engine went beyond the danger mark. Taxying fast was not easy, with my wing-tips perilously close to a cliff face on one side of the narrow track, and a stone wall on the other—the long nose blocking my vision did not help—but I was thoroughly enjoying the skill required. I knew, of course, that Maltese labourers are removed from the aerodrome when there's a raid, but I did not expect their bus driver to take a short cut. Suddenly the bus came round the corner at me—I risked tipping the Spitfire on to its nose by applying fierce brake—but the bus, without making any attempt to stop, swerved towards the gap between my wing and the wall: there wasn't room: the driver's cab struck my wing tip with a crash of metal: the nose of my aircraft, with its turning propellor, swung towards the passengers crowding the bus windows—an anxious moment—but managing to stop the propellor I enjoyed the inevitable impact. The cannon protruding forward from my starboard wing ended up inside the passengers' compartment: the expressions on the quickly withdrawn faces were magnificent. The Maltese streaming out of the bus, ran off down the road—with the driver running after them. Time was short, the raid was approaching; Chiefy was quite right in not wanting me to fly the damaged plane: the crumpled wing-tip did have an adverse effect on the controls as I climbed steeply into the sky.'

By January 1941 a satellite landing ground was being prepared half-way along this road-cum-taxiway, one-and-three-quarter miles south-east of Luqa aerodrome. Called Safi Landing Ground, it was completed by February the following year and consisted of two grass strips at 250 ft. altitude, one E-W, the other NW-SE, each 1200 yards long.

## QRENDI

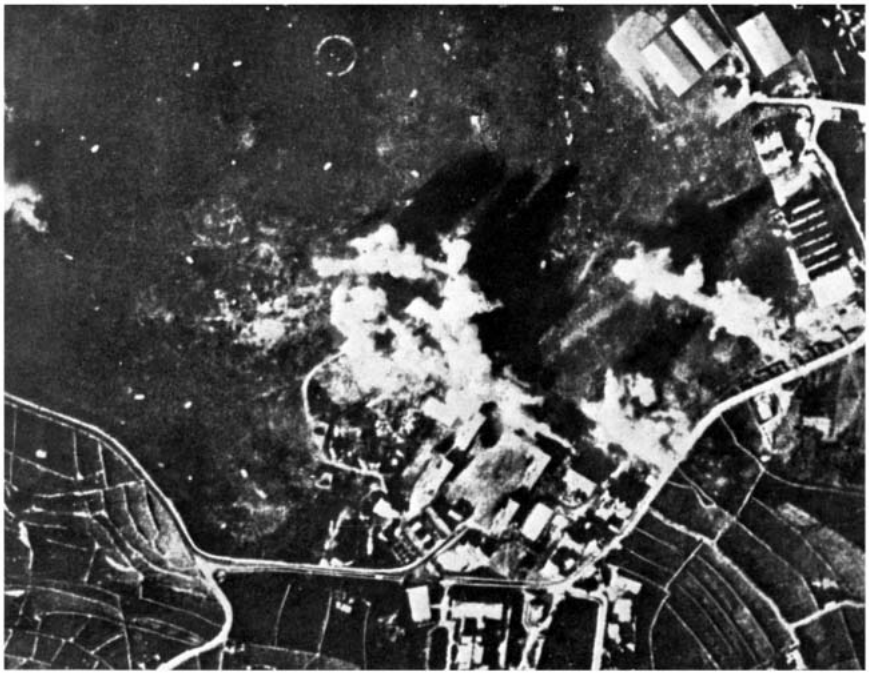
A site was found for a second satellite airfield two-and-three-quarter miles south-west of Luqa aerodrome and construction was begun in 1940. The aerodrome was opened on November 10, 1942 by Air Vice Marshal Park, who 'beat up' the aerodrome in his Hurricane OK2. The airfield consisted of two tarmac runways 1200 x 50 yards (with 25-yard strips of grass on either side) running in E-W and NW-SE directions.

## XEWKIJA

The shortest-lived airfield in the Maltese islands was that constructed on the island of Gozo, which lies a mile or so to the north-west of Malta.

When preparations were being made for Operation 'Husky', Malta's airfields were crammed with British and American aircraft. The Allied Commanders felt there was need for further Spitfire reinforcements to support General Patton's Seventh Army before, during and after the initial stages of the invasion. It

**Above: Some of the present-day installations on the northern corner of Hal Far aerodrome, built on the cliff-top in the south-eastern corner of Malta. Right: An Italian reconnaissance photograph showing the same corner of the airfield under a bombing attack.**



was at that stage that the Americans decided to build an additional airstrip to operate about another hundred Spitfires, and the choice, for some reason, fell on Gozo.

The Governor Lord Gort, Air Vice-Marshal Sir Keith Park, and various American and British engineers visited the sister island at the end of May 1943 and picked out a site skirting Xewkija, Ghajnsielem, Nadur and Xaghra villages. The land, which comprised many fertile fields, belonged to various farmers. In a recent interview, the Archbishop of Malta, His Grace Mgr. Sir Michael Gonzi, who was at that time Bishop of Gozo, said that Lord Gort had asked him to tackle the Gozitan farmers. The Bishop explained the position to all the farmers concerned, who agreed to cede the land 'for the good of the country'. They were, of course, duly compensated. However, 'Husky' was planned for June and little time was left for the construction. General Eisenhower records in 'Crusade in Europe' how the problem was solved:

'It was so ill-favored in the matter of terrain that British field engineers, who depended to a great extent upon hand tools and light equipment, had given up any hope of producing a field there in time for use in the Sicilian campaign. Happily, just at the critical moment Air Marshal Park, in command of the air forces of the island, had as a visitor an American engineer who specialized in the construction of airfields.

Park told the engineer of this particular problem and after showing him the projected site asked for an estimate on the time it would take to construct an operational strip. The answer was a nonchalant "Ten days." This struck Park—who is a human dynamo himself—as so preposterous that he thought himself the victim of a joke. However, upon noting the thoughtful way in which the engineer was considering the problem, he asked: "When can you start?"

"As soon as my equipment can get here, which should take several days."

The upshot was that messages began to fly through the air, and thirteen days from the time the first American construction unit stepped on the island the first fighter plane was taking off from the strip.

To perform this seeming miracle the engineers had employed almost every type of modern earth-moving machinery to be found on any large construction job in the United States, equipment that British engineers envied but had never dreamed could be brought into such a remote part of an active theater of war. This story was told to me over and over again by British officers on the island whose admiration for the American engineers was scarcely short of awe.'

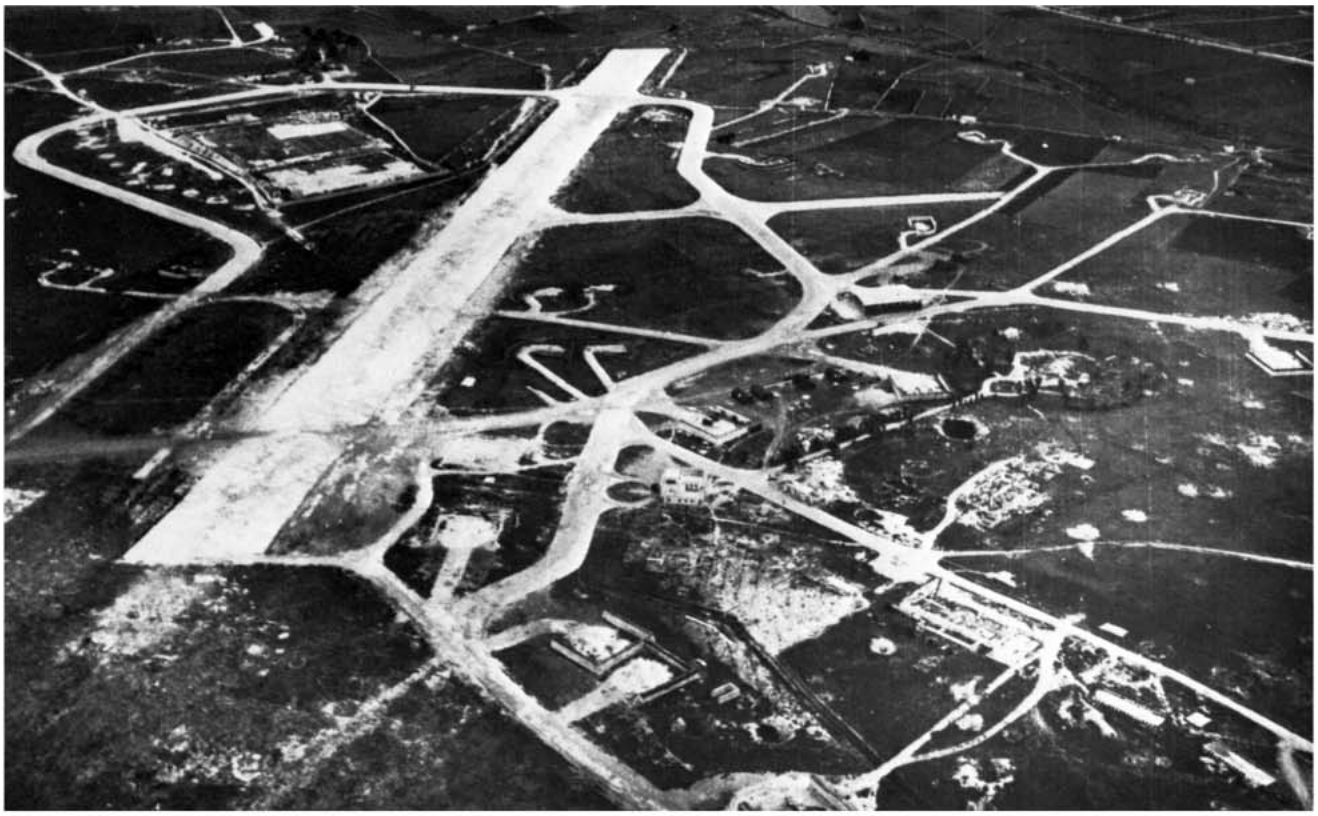
Once the land was available, a Company of American Army Engineers arrived in Malta from Tunisia. With the help of Gozitans, the

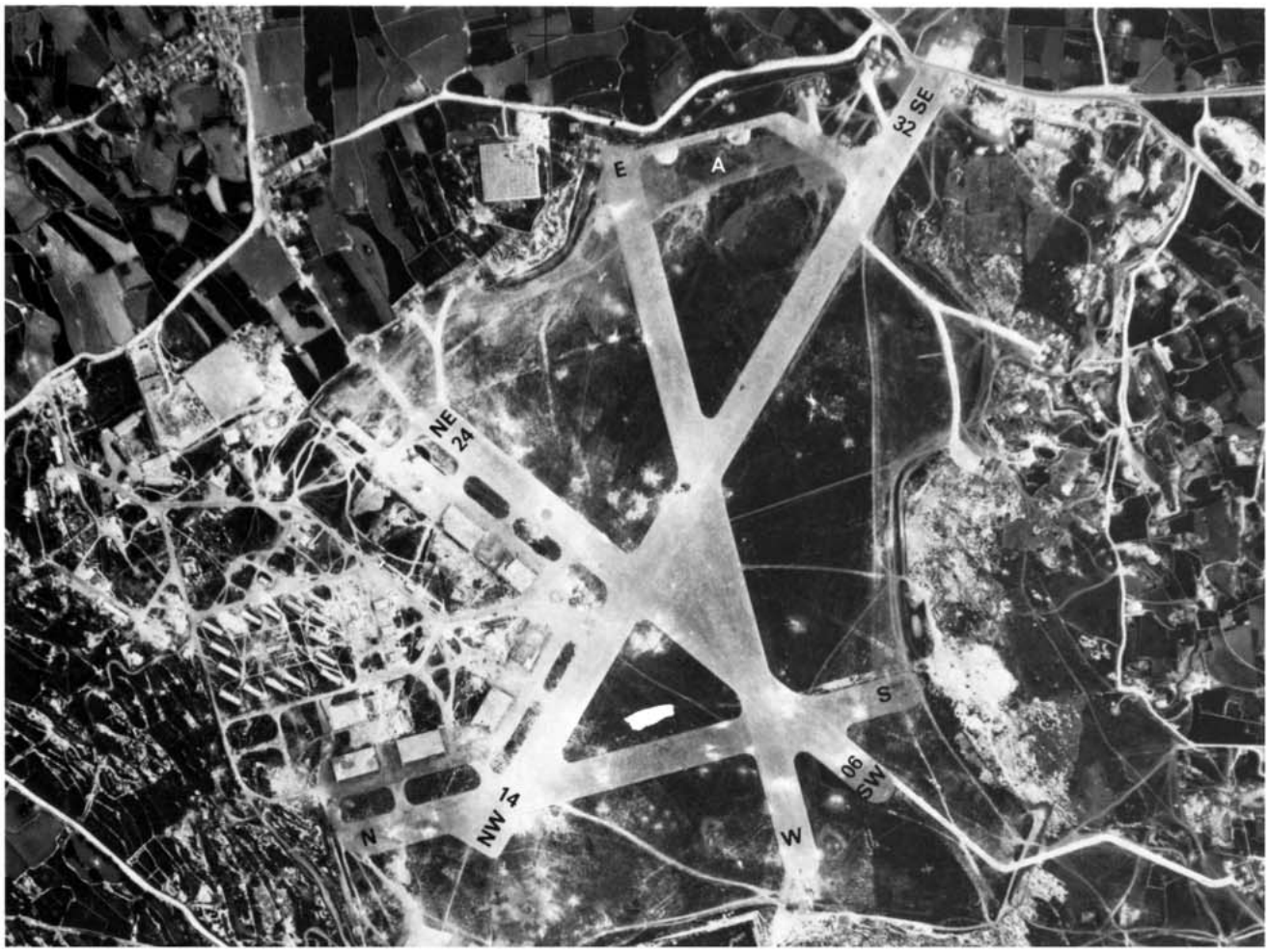
Americans started unloading a vast quantity of equipment and material at Marsalforn Bay on June 6, 1943. Hundreds of local labourers were engaged and work on the levelling of the area started on the 8th. In the process, an old historic tower and many farm-houses were demolished. The two runways were operational by the 20th and the first Spitfires landed on the 23rd. Some sources state that Sir Keith Park made an earlier landing. The entire project was complete by June 29.

Spitfires from Gozo supported allied bombers operating from Malta in raids over Sicily and Italy. They later provided continuous coverage during the landing operations and until a beachhead was firmly established in Sicily. The airstrip fell into disuse early in August 1943 when the Allies captured and reserviced airfields in Sicily. The land, which had been surrendered by the local farmers, reverted to its former owners and today no traces of the airfield or runways remain to be seen.

**Above: A mechanical-shovel rips up the runway at Ta'Qali in May 1975 in preparation to build factories.**

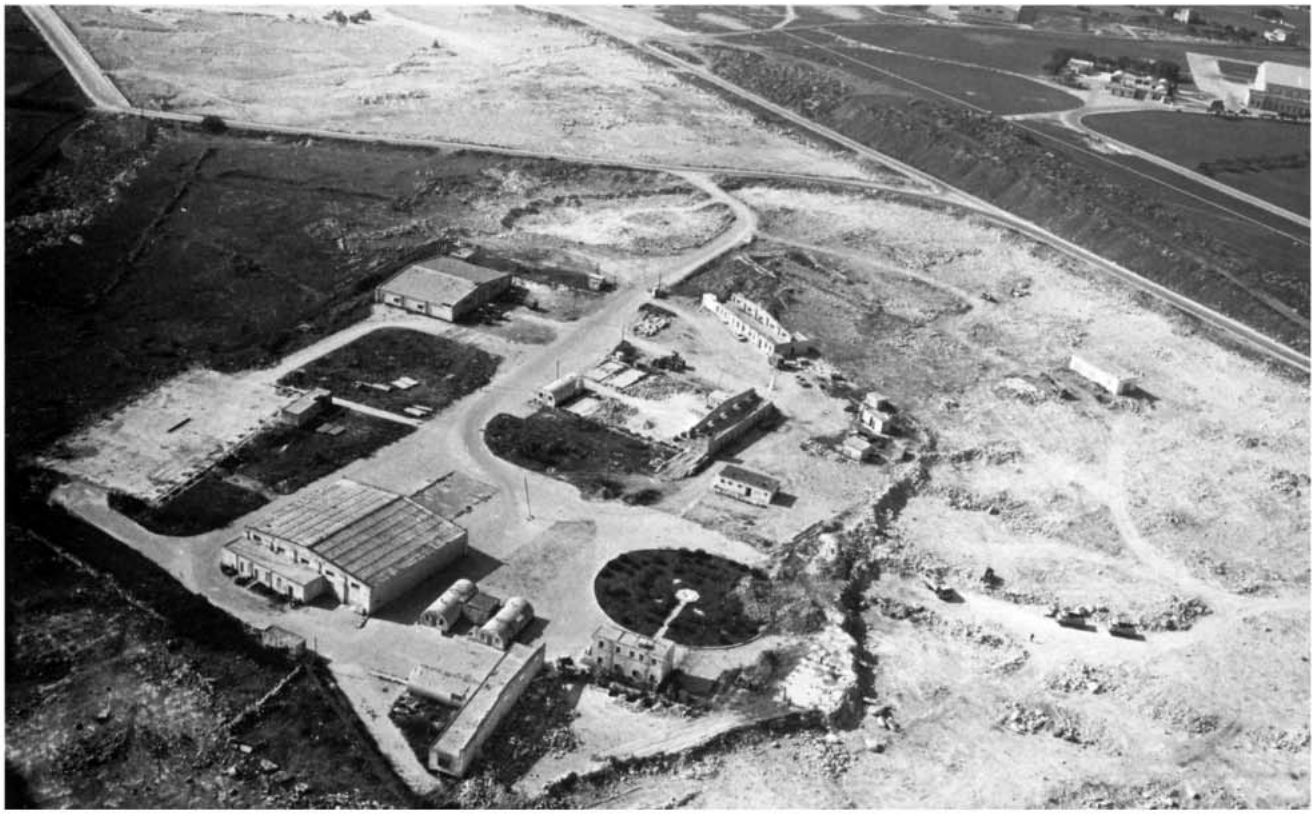
**Below: Ta'Qali as it appeared in December 1944. Although the war has now passed Malta by, bomb craters and dispersal pens are clearly visible (US National Archives). Bottom: The abandoned airfield today. The old original control tower still stands.**

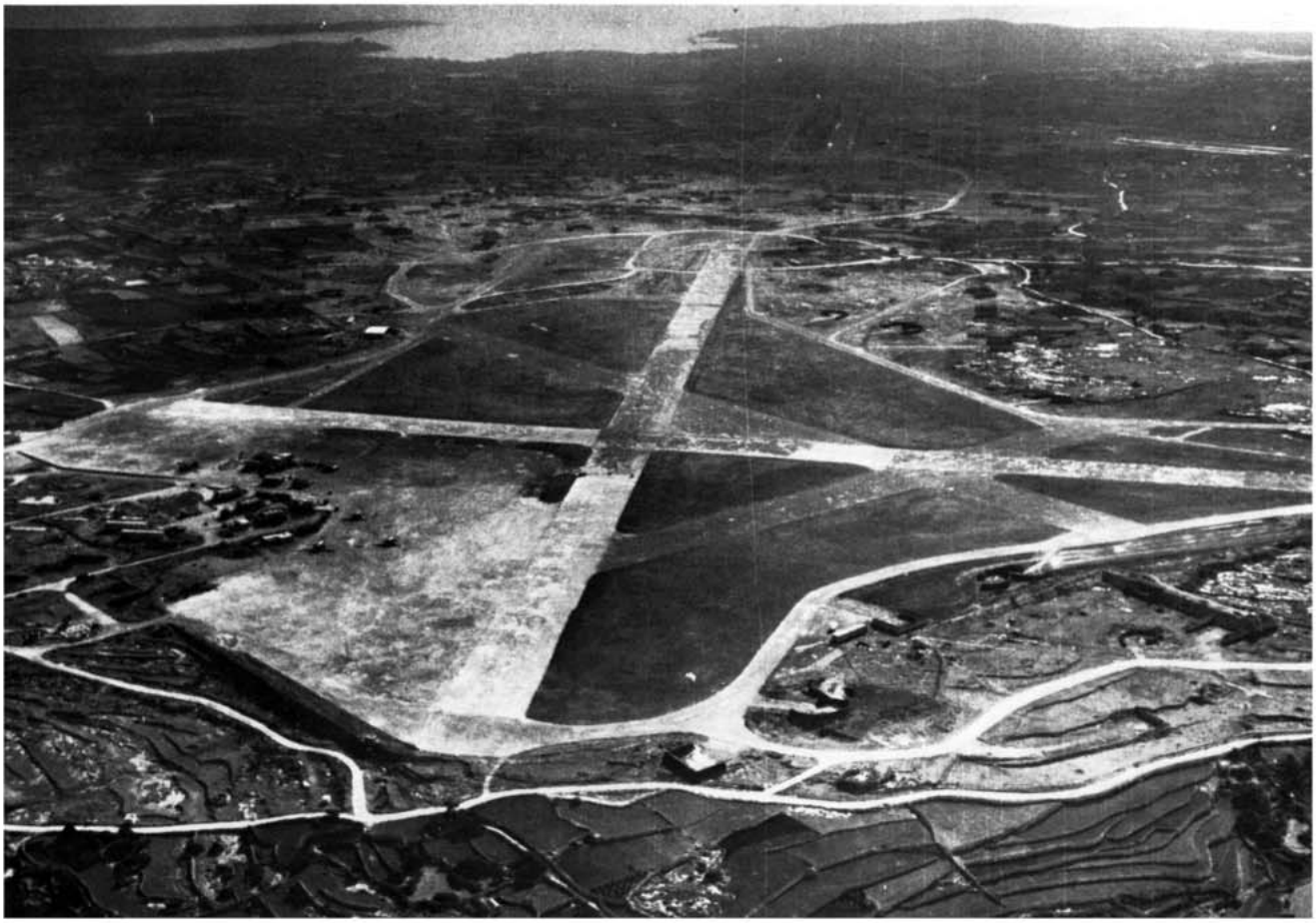





Above: Luqa photographed by Flight Lieutenant George Burges in 1940. Note the RAF installations on the northern edge (to the left of the photo); one hangar has been destroyed. 'A' marks the site of the present terminal building.

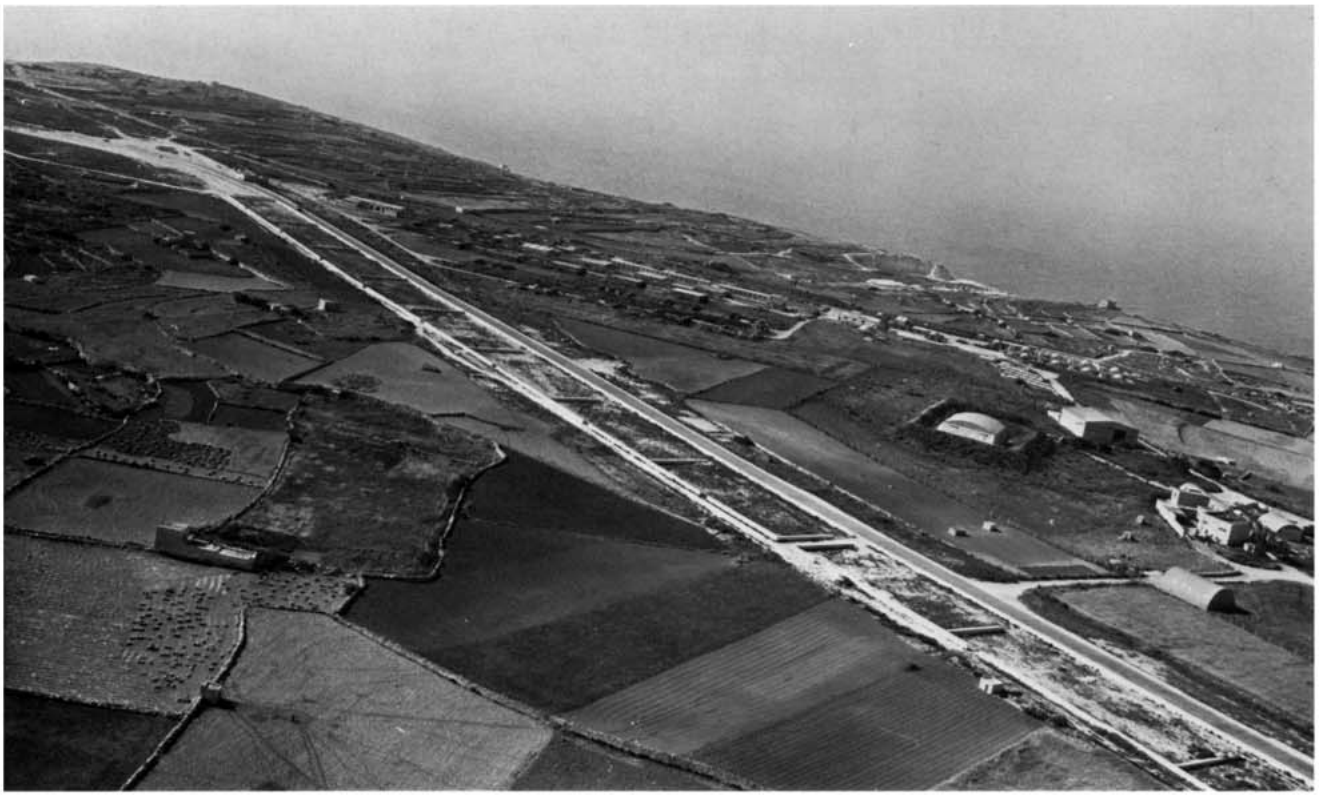
Below: The extension of the NW-SE runway out towards Hal Far is obliterating the old Safi strip. Here, the runway moves relentlessly towards these old Safi hangars, some of which were being demolished when we took our photograph.





Above: An American photograph taken on December 19, 1944 from 1300 ft. looking down the NW-SE runway to Safi strip, visible in the blackground. The N-S and E-W runways are only slightly visible. Blast pens can be seen around the perimeter (US National Archives).

Below: Our 1975 photograph of the area between the NW and SW runways. Part of the E-W runway remains by the parked Canberras. The NW-SE runway in the foreground (now 1781 yards long) is now referred to by its compass bearing of 14/32; the NE-SW runway in the background, 06/24, is 2600 yards long.

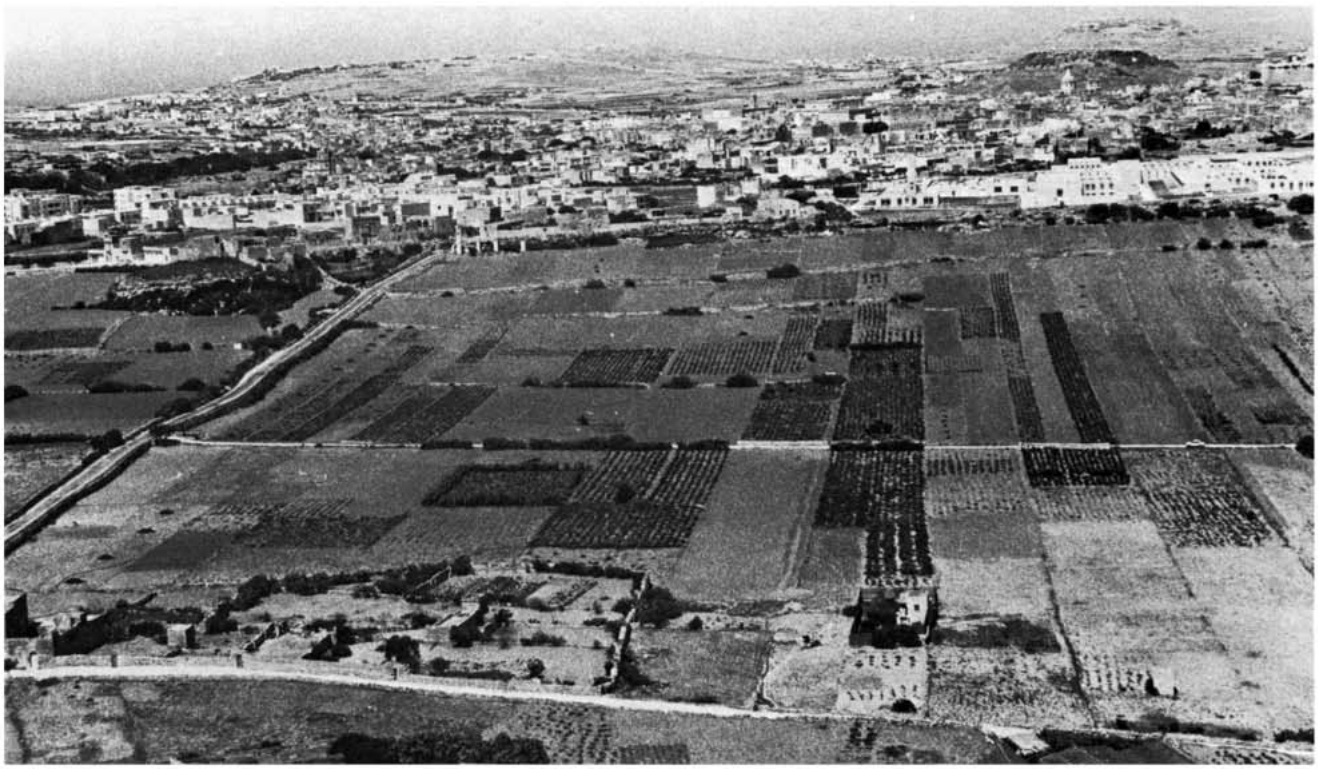


Above: Qrendi NW-SE runway, looking south with old installations in the background. This is virtually the view Sir Keith Park would have had flying his Hurricane OK2 in the picture below. Wearing his traditional white helmet Sir Keith, AOC Malta, 'beat up' the 'drome at the opening ceremony on November 10, 1942 (IWM).

Bottom: Our comparison from the ground, showing the unusual stone walls which divide up the runway.

Above: Marsa Race Course, situated at the inland end of Grand Harbour, was to be used as an emergency landing ground.

Above: August 19, 1943, Stand easy! These Yanks guarding Xewkija airstrip can now relax as the battle for Sicily has been won (IWM). Right: However, in 1975, the battle of the comparison photographs goes on. A farmer friend took this for us on Gozo Island, after we ran out of time. Below: The site of the temporary airstrip today—it was abandoned in 1943.



# The Air Battle begins . . .

By the end of March 1940, it had become obvious to Air Commodore Maynard that the promise of four fighter squadrons for Malta would not be kept. The home defence of the British Isles had top priority. Luckily, of the three radar installations that had been sent abroad prior to the outbreak of war, one had been installed in Malta, and by March 1939 the set was in operation.

Whilst the Air Commodore was anxiously considering the problem, his Chief Administrative Officer, Group-Captain N. G. Gardner, discovered there were eight Naval Gloster Gladiator aircraft crated on the slipway at Kalafrana. They had missed being loaded on the *Glorious* when she had sailed to take part in the Norwegian campaign. Air Commodore Maynard (together with his ADC, Flight-Lieutenant George Burges) was living at the time in Admiralty House with Admiral Cunningham. They had continually discussed the defence of the island, and the Sea Gladiators were quickly released to the RAF.

It was the task of the Aircraft Repair Section of Kalafrana, under Flying Officer G. A. V. Collins, to supervise the uncrating, assembly and rigging of the Naval machines. According to the Hal Far operations record book, on April 19, four Gladiators were issued to the Station Flight. However, a more serious problem at the time was a shortage of pilots. Few pilots remained on the island since No. 202 (Flying Boat) Squadron was transferred to Gibraltar at the end of 1939. In the end a flight of seven officers was scraped together:

Squadron Leader A. C. 'Jock' Martin, from the staff at Hal Far, who was to command the Flight.

Flight Lieutenant George Burges, Air Commodore Maynard's personal assistant.

Flight Lieutenant Peter G. Keeble, a member of the original Hal Far Station Flight.

Flying Officer Peter W. Hartley, a Staff Pilot from No. 3 Anti-Aircraft Co-operation Unit.

Flying Officer John L. Waters from the same unit.

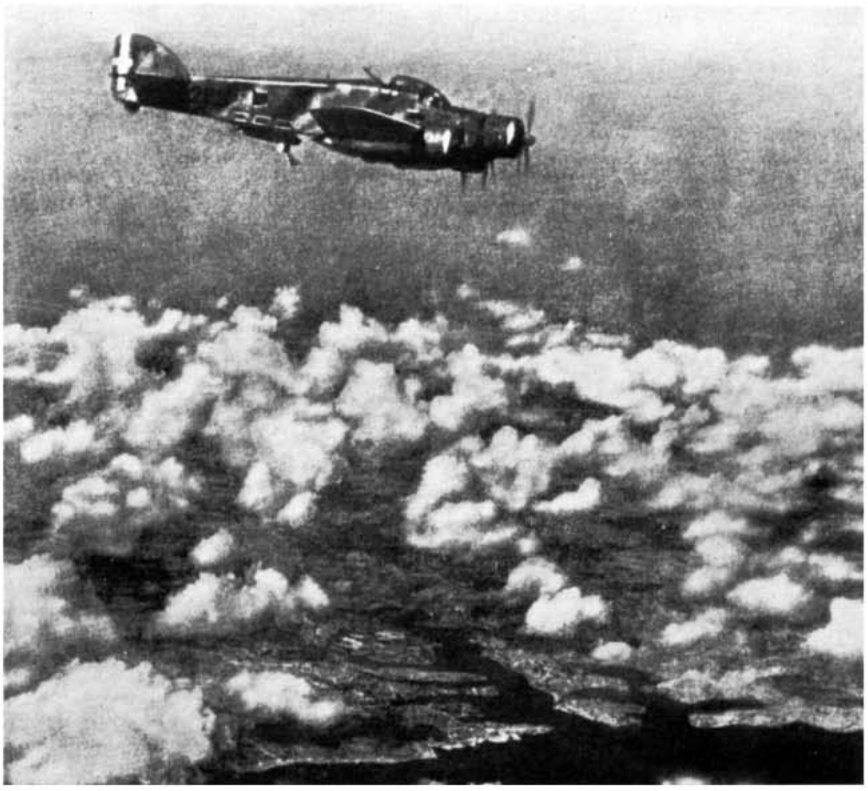
Flying Officer William J. Woods, ex Station Flight Hal Far.

Pilot Officer Peter B. Alexander from the radio-controlled Queen Bee Experimental Flight.

A temporary set-back came on April 28 when Flying Officer Collins received instructions to re-crate the four Gladiators and return them to Kalafrana, as they had been allocated to Alexandria by the Admiralty. The order had to be obeyed, but no sooner had this been carried out, than Admiral Cunningham obtained the release of the aircraft. Instructions were issued to re-assemble the aircraft, and by May 3 the machines were back on Hal Far aerodrome.

After the use of airborne troops by the Germans on May 10 in Holland, it was considered expedient to block the aerodrome, day and night, with motor vehicles, packing cases, furniture and any other handy junk. Further precautions were taken on May 15; the boundary was wired and loaded pistols, with six spare rounds, were issued to officers and senior NCOs—to be carried only when on duty! Outposts around the aerodrome were manned and two belts of triple-dannert wire appeared on the eastern perimeter. 'A' Company of the Devonshire Regiment with a platoon of Bren gun carriers were responsible for airfield defence.

The lack of pilots dictated a shift system



**Mamma mia. Those Italian pilots have done it again! Very good at positioning their aircraft for the attack on Malta—superimposed on a suitable background of Malta. Two Italian reconnaissance photographs depicting the attacks on the island!**

using two flights of three pilots. 'A' Flight would be on standby from dawn to 8.00 a.m., 'B' Flight 8.00 a.m. to 12.00 noon, 'A' Flight 12.00 noon to 4.00 p.m., followed by 'B' Flight from 4.00 p.m. to dusk. The Flight was on two minutes standby.

The first air raid on Malta, the first of 3340 raids during the next three years, started at 6.49 a.m. on June 11, the day following Mussolini's declaration of war. Ten Savoia-Marchetti SM79 tri-motor bombers attacked Valletta and surrounding districts, and sixteen small 110 kg. bombs were dropped on Hal Far aerodrome. Damage was negligible, but the AA gunners were able to shoot down one Italian machine and damage another. During the first raid, Flight Lieutenant Burges managed to press home an attack but the Italian aircraft escaped with their superior speed.

The first victory for the Gladiators, Malta's only aerial defence, came later that day when they intercepted a raid at 7.25 p.m. south of Grand Harbour, Flying Officer Woods shot down one of the fighter escort, a Fiat CR42 biplane.

**Flight Lieutenant George Burges in Gladiator N5519, plugged into the trolley accumulator at standby with one of the other pilots. Note that N5519 has been converted with a three-bladed propeller for extra speed whilst the other retains the two-bladed 'fan'.**

**Left: War Headquarters, Malta. The entrance to Lascaris Barracks in 'the great ditch' below the Duke of York entrance to Valletta (IWM). Above: Except for the 'fern', little changed today.**

**Left: The compound at War Headquarters. The GOC's office was in the right hand arch (IWM). Above: A new central block built in 1945, makes an exact comparison difficult. The entrance on the left leads to the Officers Mess.**

It was immediately evident that in order to make up for the Gladiators' lack of speed, the intercept time must be shortened. One measure was to have the pilots sitting in their aircraft strapped in—they would then start their engines and take off without warming up (George Burges recalls it was hot enough!). This meant an increase of a couple of thousand feet by the time they intercepted the Italian aircraft. Because of the heat and sitting for hours on end at readiness in their cockpits, the shifts were adjusted to give each pilot one day off in three, making three flights of two pilots each. It was felt that it was better to have two Gladiators in the correct place rather than three too low, too late.

In order to improve the performance of the Gladiators, three-bladed propellors were fitted and the emergency boost control modified. Although this would mean the aircraft would have greater speed to intercept the faster Italian machines, it also meant the risk of straining the engines. Inevitably the Bristol Mercury engines did blow cylinders; first on Squadron Leader Martin's Gladiator, then on Flying Officer Waters'. Eventually with great effort some spare Mercury 15 Blenheim engines were converted to Mk. 8s to fit the Gladiators and keep them flying.

The obstructed aerodrome at Hal Far with one fixed flightpath increased the dangers on taking off and landing; on June 21 both Squadron Leader Martin and Flight Lieutenant Hartley crashed on the aerodrome and, on June 23, Flying Officer Woods collided with the radio-controlled Queen Bee whilst landing. The pilots in each case were uninjured and the precious aircraft made airworthy again.

Italian raids occurred several times each day; the Gladiators were constantly outnumbered, and it was soon evident to the pilots and the Maltese people that they had in their midst a unique unit. Fighting as they were on the island on which St. Paul was shipwrecked in AD 59-60, it was apt that the Gladiators were subsequently referred to using the immortal words in St. Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians: 'Faith, Hope and Charity' (1 Corinthians 12:13).

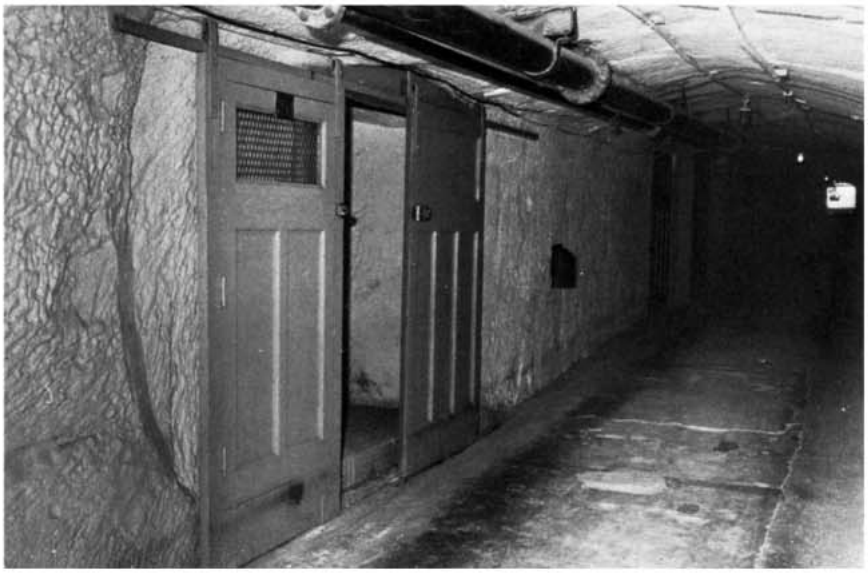
# Reinforcements arrive

On June 22, a second Italian aircraft, an SM79, was shot down by Flight Lieutenant Burges off Marsaxlokk Bay, followed a few days later by another of the same type. For nearly two weeks the seven pilots fought on alone against increasing odds; when they came back to base in their shot-up Gladiators, the ground crews worked miracles repairing the machines without the luxury of spare parts, cannibalising and exchanging parts to enable them to continue the fight. Never had there been a more unequal fight—seven against the 200-strong Regia Aeronautica in Sicily.

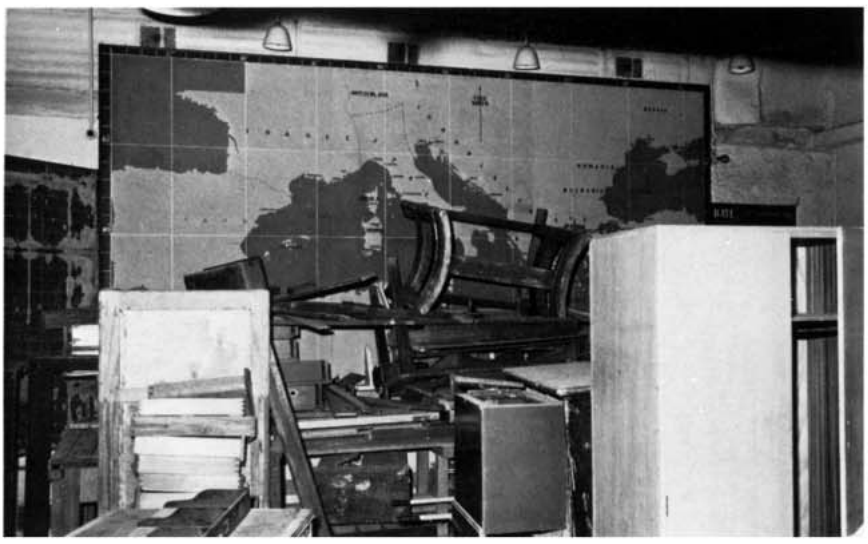
Not until June 28 did reinforcements arrive in the form of four Hurricanes which landed en route to the Middle East. Air Commodore Maynard soon persuaded the Air Ministry to keep the fighters and pilots in Malta to help the hard-pressed Fighter Flight.

The arrival of the Hurricanes caused the Italians to step up the fighter cover on their bombing raids, so that even with the reinforcements, the odds grew. On July 13, when Flight Lieutenant Burges was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for six confirmed victories, only one Gladiator and one Hurricane were serviceable. However, the Hal Far mechanics out-did themselves and always seemed to repair the machines in the end.

The first tragedy, which affected all the Maltese people anxiously following the battle



**Above: This tunnel links the outer entrance with the inner compound. On the left is the doorway, deep underground, of the old Combined Operations Room. Below: Navy, Army and RAF personnel in the operations room which was in use until 1967 (IWM). We were allowed to photograph the room as it is today.**



**Left: Anti-aircraft defences for Grand Harbour. Here, a Bofors on the Upper Barracca is in action. In the background, Dockyard Creek and French Creek (IWM). Above: Well, the Germans finally made it—at least these two frauleins did!**

above their tiny island, came on July 31. Flight Lieutenant Keeble, flying one of the Hurricanes, was caught in a dog-fight over Grand Harbour, and was pursued by a CR42. A gunner who witnessed the combat described what he saw:

'I watched them turning and diving, trying to get a shot in at each other. That Italian was good, one of the rare ones, and he finally managed to get on Keeble's tail and shoot him down. He was so close to the ground when he fired at Keeble's plane that he couldn't pull out in time and crashed into the ground. They both fell in the same field within a few yards of one another.'

So died the first of the few.

On the last day of July Flying Officer Hartley, flying one of the Gladiators, was shot down in flames. Incredibly he was picked up alive and taken to Imtarfa Hospital where, in spite of severe burns, he survived.

By now the Air Ministry was endeavouring to live up to its promise to supply four fighter squadrons for Malta's defence, even with the reality of the impending German air attack on Britain. Maltese needs were greater and twelve Hurricanes were prepared, transported into the Mediterranean on the aircraft carrier *Argus* and flown off on August 2 when within range of Malta. They landed at Luqa to form No. 261 Squadron. Almost immediately Luqa had its first heavy raid, and during the next two weeks, three of the Hurricanes were destroyed.

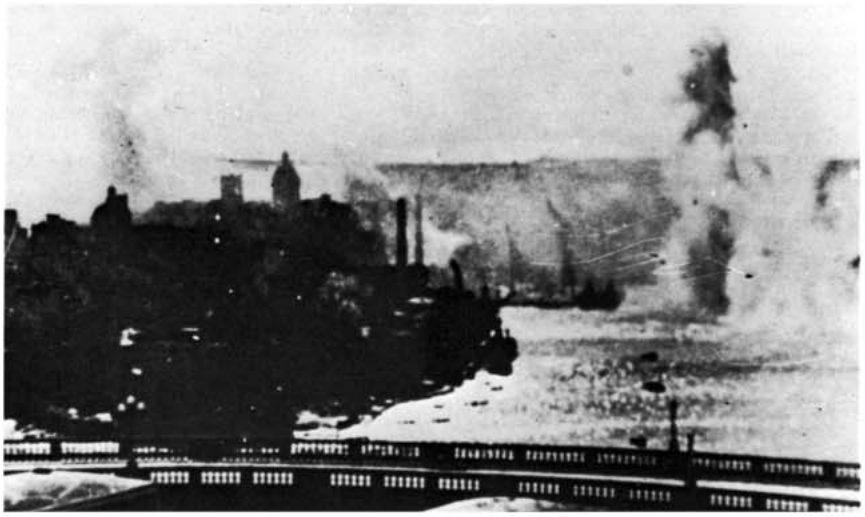
On September 11, Junkers 87 dive bombers appeared over Malta for the first time, albeit flown by Italian pilots. Airfields were the prime target and continual efforts had to be made to fill in bomb craters. The dwindling Hurricanes were now the mainstay of the defence and on November 17 the next instalment of reinforcement aircraft took off from the *Argus*. This time the Hurricanes were ordered off too far away—only four out of the twelve arrived. Their tanks contained respectively twelve, four, three and two gallons of petrol.

Slowly, Malta was beginning to answer back; firstly as a base for reconnaissance aircraft (which supplied photographs and intelligence for the attack on Taranto Harbour on November 11), and then for bombers with the formation, in December, of No. 148 Squadron comprising sixteen Wellingtons, based at Luqa. Hitler, distrusting the Italians' ability to close the Mediterranean to British shipping, and to protect his supply routes to North Africa, pressed upon Mussolini the services of Fliegerkorps X, in all 172 aircraft.

# Enter: The Germans

The debut was a massed attack on January 10, 1941, using sixty Ju87s and He 111s against a convoy bound for Malta. It was evident from the determination with which the attacks were pressed home that the aircraft were now being flown by Germans. The aircraft carrier *Illustrious*, hit six times, limped into Grand Harbour that night. With a prime target immobile in French Creek, Malta awaited the German onslaught.

Bad weather prevented its start, enabling repairs to the *Illustrious* to proceed unmolested. On January 16, what was later called 'the Illustrious blitz' began. Seventy Ju87s and Ju88s escorted by CR42s attacked Grand Harbour. Four Hurricanes and three Fulmars from the *Illustrious* were all that could be mustered in defence. In spite of a



**Above: The aircraft carrier Illustrious, hidden by spray, under attack in French Creek (Times of Malta). Below: Today, merchant ships are berthed in the same creek. In the foreground Duke of York Avenue, built after WW1, spanning the great ditch which forms a dry moat around Valletta.**

**Left: The archways of the Upper Barracca overlooking Grand Harbour were hit by a bomb on December 24, 1941 (IWM). An excellent job has been made at invisible mending using the ubiquitous Maltese stone.**

tremendous barrage from the anti-aircraft defences protecting the harbour, great damage was caused to the dock area with 200 houses destroyed. The aircraft carrier escaped with only one hit.

Two days later the aerodromes were the target for a hundred German bombers and Luqa was made unserviceable. Ta'Qali was already unusable, bogged down due to rain. On January 19 the *Illustrious* was hit again but despite the damage, a miracle was performed by the repairers in HM Dockyard. Four days later the *Illustrious* was able to leave and reached Egypt safely.

On January 30, six more Hurricanes arrived, this time having flown from North Africa. However, over an altitude of 16,000ft., the Hurricane Mk. 1s were no match for the Messerschmitt 109s which appeared in increasing numbers as the Germans went all out to obtain air superiority over the island. Fighter sweeps appeared almost every day and heavy dive bombing attacks were made on the airfields. In a raid on January 26, Luqa was made unserviceable and six of its Wellingtons burnt out on the ground. The Germans with their superior numbers were slowly winning the air battle. In March, the remainder of the bombers were withdrawn to Egypt to avoid total destruction and in the same month one of the Sea Gladiators, having survived miraculously for nearly a year, was burnt out at Hal Far. The few remaining Hurricanes had to take off against increasing odds as the Luftwaffe Commander, General Geissler, went in for the kill. Malta was surrounded; isolated nearly 1000 miles from the British bases at either end of the Mediterranean.

Almost too late, on April 3 much-needed reinforcements arrived, when twelve Mk. IIA Hurricanes piloted by Battle of Britain veterans flew off the *Ark Royal* led by two Skuas. They were met by a Sunderland a hundred miles out and guided to Malta. On April 27, the arrival of another twenty-three Hurricanes enabled Air Vice-Marshal Maynard (promoted in February) to form a second fighter squadron, No. 185, to share the burden of defence.

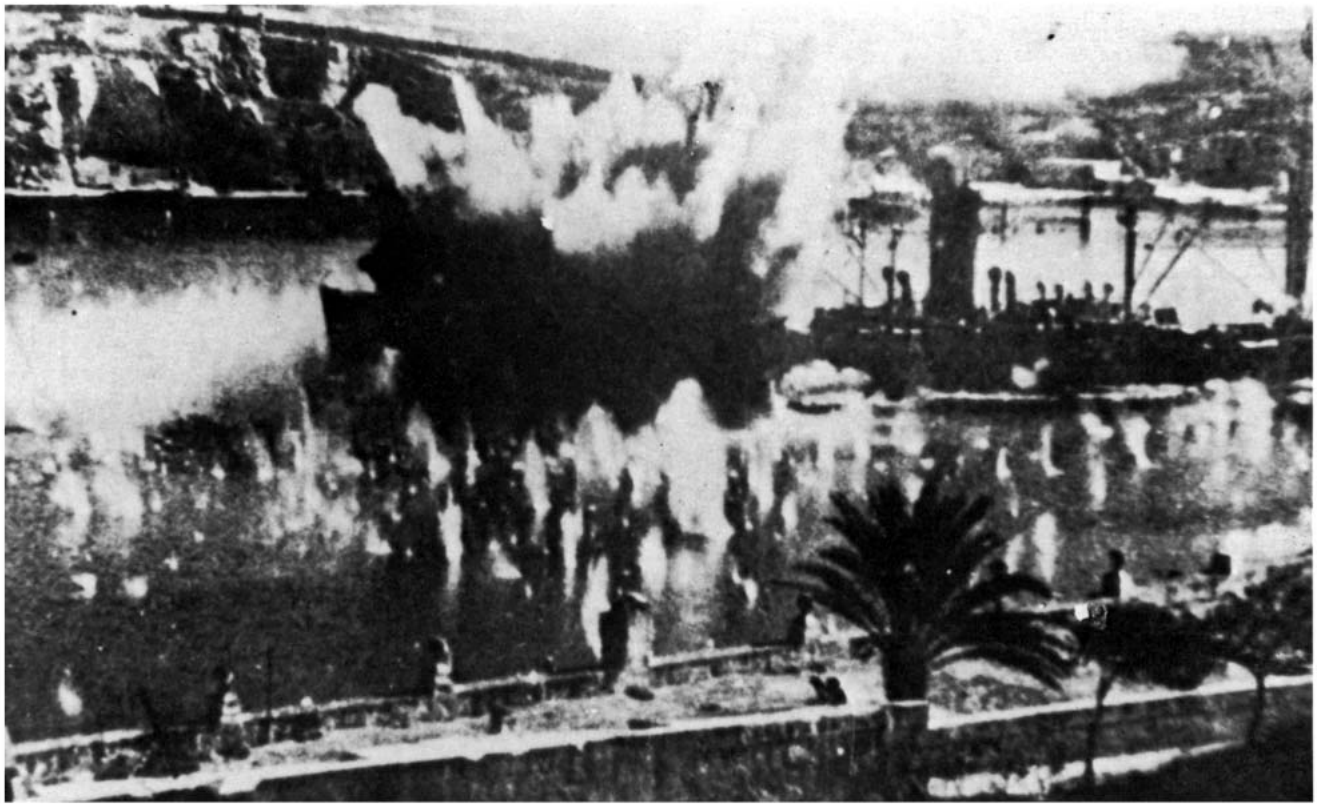
Then at the beginning of May, when they were poised for final victory, Hitler withdrew the Luftwaffe from Sicily to take part in the attack on Russia. The end of this phase of the battle was marked, later that month, when Air Vice-Marshal Hugh Lloyd took over from Air Vice-Marshal Maynard.

The new Commanding Officer found himself engaged solely by the Regia Aeronautica. However, unlike Maynard the year before, Lloyd found Hurricanes were now more plentiful, and the Mk.IIs were more than a match for the SM79s and CR42s now appearing over the island. Night raids became more and more frequent and a Night Fighter Unit was formed with successful results. It was during this period that the Italian Naval Flotilla X attacked Grand Harbour, an incident described later.

Malta's strategic position was soon turned to good effect with ever-increasing raids on the surrounding Axis-held territories and for the next six months Malta was largely left alone and, as a result, regained the initiative.

The increasing success of the Malta-based bombers in sinking Axis convoys to North Africa led Hitler to resolve to strike at the root of the problem. On October 29, he gave orders for Generalfeldmarschall Kesselring and his Luftflotte II to transfer from Russia to Italy. Express orders were given to him to suppress Malta and to attack convoys supplying it. On December 22, the second air battle of Malta began.

**The ruins of Valletta. A soldier looks towards the Lower Barracca in 1942; the editor likewise in 1975.**



# 1942 – The Second Battle begins...

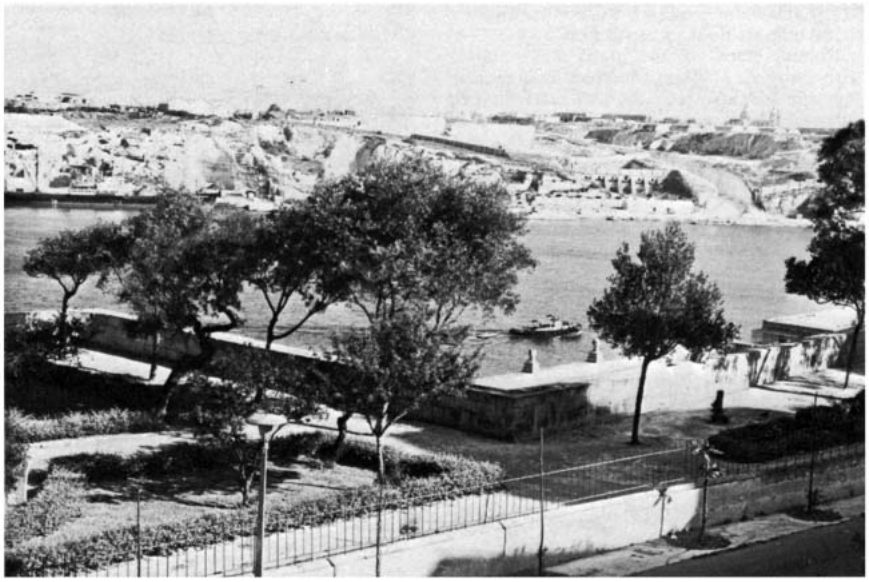
Over 200 aircraft attacked the island, concentrating on the airfields. The Hurricane IIs, although outclassed, managed to break up the formations and reduce the effects of the bombing. The new year, 1942, opened with over five hundred sorties against the island; worse still, bad weather waterlogged Hal Far and Ta'Qali so that the whole fighter force had to concentrate on the bomber airfield at Luqa.

On February 1, the Air Ministry in London informed Air Vice-Marshal Lloyd that they were proposing to send fifteen Spitfire VBs to help even the fight with the Me109s. Strict instructions were given in the signal to Malta, to the effect that the undercarriages were not as robust as those of the Hurricanes and that they needed good surfaced runways. In Malta!

On February 7, a record of thirteen hours six minutes were spent under alert; a total of sixteen alarms in twenty-four hours. A few days later rain again made the two grass aerodromes unserviceable.

When the mid-February convoy from Alexandria was sunk, Malta faced a grim future with only a few weeks supplies in hand. More than 2000 bomber sorties had hit the island in the previous thirty days; 1000 tons of bombs had been dropped in February alone and the Hurricane defenders were depleted as they fought, outnumbered and outclassed, against continual sweeps by Me109s. When they then returned to their aerodromes, they found them cratered and littered with burnt-out aircraft.

The dispersal scheme started by Air Vice-Marshal Maynard was enlarged and improved; using 2500 Army personnel, dispersal pens were built using earth-filled petrol cans, oil drums and masonry. This work force, which at times topped 3000 men, was split between the three airfields; the Royal West Kents and the Buffs at Luqa, the Devons at Hal Far, the Manchesters at Ta'Qali. During the next three months, they built twenty-seven miles of dispersal runway, fourteen large bomber pens, 175 fighter pens and 101 other pens for reconnaissance and naval aircraft. The men worked twelve hours on and twelve hours off building pens and filling craters; the work was vital if the few remaining aircraft were to survive. Pens even had to be built to protect the few petrol bowsers and steam-rollers left.



**The Talabot under attack at her mooring at Buoy 7 in Grand Harbour where she later sank (Times of Malta). Lieutenant W. M. Eastman and Captain R. Jephson-Jones were both awarded the George Cross for working aboard the burning ammunition ship. The last wreckage was removed from the harbour in 1967.**

The Spitfires arrived on March 7, flown off from the *Eagle* and they landed at Ta'Qali. The Germans, aware of their arrival and long flight to the island, timed a raid to take place as the aircraft were on the ground refuelling.

An RAF Sergeant watched them arrive:

'The Spitfires came waggling their wings as if to say "OK boys, we're here". But that very same evening the "gen" went round that a big plot was building up over Sicily and within half an hour or so we were to see that Jerry really meant business. Standing at a vantage point in the village of Zurrieq, I saw the first waves of 88s coming all the way over the island. They dived down on Ta'Qali where the whole batch of "Spits" had landed. We tried to count them as they came in, but it was an utter impossibility. Straight down they went, and one could see the stuff leave the kites before it really got dark.

'The guns were belting rounds up like

nothing on earth; tracers filled the sky, and if things weren't so serious one could have called it a lovely sight. The din was terrific and Ta'Qali seemed to be ablaze from end to end. The lads would shout that some gun or other had been knocked out; but no; they've started again pushing up rounds harder than ever. The Jerry seemed to be under orders to finish the place and, by hell, he tried his best.'

By mid-March—when the four hundred aircraft of the Luftwaffe had reduced the defenders to thirty Hurricanes—the time was ripe for the next move. Hitler gave his blessing for all-out Luftwaffe support for a planned Italian invasion of the island. A massed attack on March 20 by 143 Ju88s and Me109s heralded the new phase; equally heavy raids followed on the next two days. On the 23rd, the attack switched to a convoy of four merchant ships approaching the island from Alexandria. One was sunk within twenty miles of Malta; of the others, the *Talabot* and the *Pampas* made Grand Harbour, while the third, the *Breconshire,* was towed into Marsaxlokk Bay with a flooded engine room.

On the following day, only five fighters could be put up to counter a raid by 200 aircraft—two days later all three ships were sunk at anchor with the majority of their cargoes lost. By the end of March, it was estimated that the tonnage of bombs dropped had more than doubled the total for February.

The attacks grew so heavy in April that the Royal Navy was forced to remove submarines from their base and ships from the harbour, leading Generalfeldmarschall Kesselring to report that he had eliminated Malta as a naval base. The few fighters, however, backed up by the guns (limited to fifteen rounds a day each), continued to resist and put up a remarkable performance in spite of the odds. At times the defence of the island rested on the guns alone, and when the AOC Middle East, Air Chief Marshal Tedder, visited the island in April he found only six fighters serviceable.

Reinforcement of the island was planned with the help of America, which had been in the war for just four months. The aircraft carrier *USS Wasp* sailed from the Clyde with 47 Spitfires on board. One of the Spitfire pilots was Denis Barnham who has written a moving story of his three months on Malta in 'One Man's Window'.

The Spitfires flew off successfully, but no sooner had they landed than the Germans, who had observed their arrival, sent in a series of heavy attacks on the airfields. Two aircraft were hit and fifteen damaged. Worse still, when the mechanics checked the aircraft they found they had been improperly prepared, with unsynchronised guns and faulty radios. Next morning only three Spitfires were serviceable at Luqa; by evening only 17 of the original 47 had survived the air attacks.

**Smoke from the burning Talabot overshadows the First World War Memorial (Times of Malta), whereas clear skies marked our 1975 visit.**

That same day an aircraft returned from a reconnaissance of Sicily. The pilot had photographed a strip being levelled in the Catanian plain; by the end of the month two more strips were discovered and their purpose was soon clear—glider fields for the invasion of Malta. The two dictators, meeting at the Berghof, decided that the invasion (called by the Germans 'Operation Hercules', and the Italians 'C3'), should take place mid-July to mid-August and the whole of Generalleutnant Student's 7th Air Division was to join the Italian Folgore Division—a combined force of 30,000 airborne troops. Ten air-transport groups with about 500 Ju52s were to be assembled in Sicily. The force would total 100,000 men—the Malta garrison numbered 30,000.

**Left: The submarine base at Manoel Island which lies in the adjacent Marsamxett Harbour (IWM). Above: Today it is the base for the luxurious craft of the Royal Malta Yacht Club.**

Left: Although a large red cross was displayed on the ground, the sick quarters at St. Andrews Barracks, used for German POWs, were bombed in May, 1942 (IWM). Above: The buildings were never rebuilt and rubble from the bombing can still be seen today.

Lance-Corporal David Bridge of 41 Commando (presently occupying the barracks), helped us trace the locations of several other pictures in this IWM series of which two more, with comparison photographs, are illustrated above and below. Note the censor's marks on the photograph, below left, to delete the Maltese-style camouflaged helmets.

As if all this was not enough, the spectre of starvation and submission through lack of supplies was Malta's most pressing problem. No convoys had got through successfully in February and March, and no convoy had sailed in April. And until sufficient air cover could be provided whilst the ships were being unloaded, the Admiralty were loath to send another. Temporary relief was provided by essential supplies ferried in by submarine, aircraft, or using the 40-knot minelayer *Welshman.*

Then, again, incredibly, when on the point of victory, Hitler repeated what he had done in 1941—he transferred his aircraft to other fronts in Africa, France and Russia. On April 29 there were 220 sorties against the island: the following day it dropped to 68 and the Italian SM79s were once again prominent.

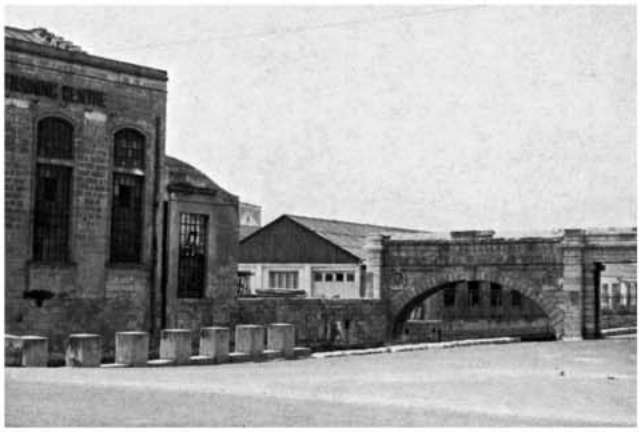
On May 9, 64 Spitfires flew in from the *USS Wasp* and *Eagle;* 62 arrived in Malta safely. There they found elaborate precautions had been made to avoid a repetition of the April disaster. Motor cyclists with numbers on their backs were ready to meet each aircraft as it touched down. They led their appropriate aircraft to specially strengthened blast pens where RAF mechanics and Army personnel were waiting. Fuel, ammunition and a new pilot were waiting in each pen. Within minutes, each aircraft had been refuelled and rearmed and was taken aloft by the experienced Malta pilot, ready to attack any intruders. The plan was so successful that at one airfield six Spitfires were in the air after nine minutes; within thirty minutes all were airborne. That day there were nine raids, all successfully intercepted. The effort of May 10 together with a further reinforcement on May 18 proved to be the turning point in the battle for air supremacy over the island.

Apart from the ill-fated convoy in March, no bulk supplies had reached the island since 1941. A further attempt was made in June, as it was believed that the Spitfires had secured a measure of superiority in the air. Two convoys sailed from Alexandria and Gibraltar simultaneously; both were intercepted and out of the seventeen supply ships which sailed, only two, *Troilus* and *Orari,* reached Malta.

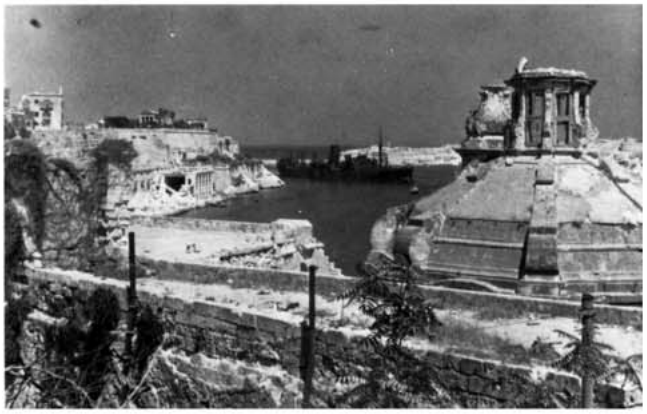
On July 1, the Luftwaffe hit back at the growing ascendancy of the Malta defences, but by the time Air Vice-Marshal Lloyd relinquished his Command on July 14, the attacks had eased and dive-bombing had ceased.

Air Vice-Marshal Sir Keith Park, the new AOC Malta, whilst appreciating that the tide had turned, realised the battle was not over. Aided by improved radar, he began a policy of forward interception of the bombers whilst over the sea. The scheme was an instant success—within a very short time the second air battle of Malta had been won.

**Above: Supplies are unloaded at the dockside in Cross Road from the Troilus and Orari, the only ships to reach Malta in the June 1942 convoy. The censor has again deleted the camouflage which, if left, would immediately identify the location as Malta.**



**Left: A policeman stands a little way down Cross Road and directs the lorry inland down Trunk Road (IWM). Today, except for a part of the Training Centre demolished by a bomb, the junction is unchanged.**



**Left: The Melbourne Star, one of the five survivors of the 'Pedestal' convoy passes Fort St. Elmo (IWM). Above: Security prevented us from using the same window in War Headquarters to take our comparison.**

What had not been won was the battle of supplies, and another convoy, the 'Santa Marija Convoy', was planned to leave Gibraltar in August under 'Operation Pedestal'. It was spotted by the Germans and attacks by U-boats, aircraft and Italian MAS boats sank the *Eagle*, two cruisers and a destroyer. Of the fourteen merchant ships that began the journey, only five reached Malta. Amongst those was the damaged tanker *Ohio;* hit six times, held afloat by the destroyers *Penn* and *Bramham*, lashed on either side, and towed by the destroyer *Rye*. Her 10,000 tons of fuel saved the day for Malta.

With supplies at hand, the Royal Navy returned to Grand Harbour. A final air attack was opened by the Luftwaffe on October 10 as a prelude to the expected offensive by the Eighth Army at El Alamein. The six hundred aircraft assembled in Sicily raided the island in waves of 100 plus; each was successfully intercepted over the sea. The attacks lasted until October 19; from then on they fell away. Although some bombs fell on the island and airfields, Goering's final order to destroy Malta in eight days, to quote the RAF History, 'was as vain and wind-stuffed as the source from which it came'.

*Allied claims at the end of the air battle were as follows:*
*Grand total of Axis aircraft destroyed: 1,252*
*Axis aircraft probably destroyed: 385*
*Axis aircraft damaged: 1051*
*Destroyed by AA guns: 241*
*Probably destroyed by AA guns: 49*
*Damaged by AA guns: 161*
*Estimated number of Axis sorties against Malta: 26,000*
*Estimated tonnage of bombs dropped on Malta: 14,154*
*Number of civilians killed: 1,540*
*Number of civilians severely injured: 1,846*
*Number of civilians slightly injured: 1,932*
*RAF losses in the air: 547*
*Damaged in the air: 504*
*Destroyed on the ground: 160*
*Damaged on the ground: 231*
*Total RAF operational flying hours: 112,247*

*Only two of the seven Station Flight pilots are alive today. George Burges was awarded the OBE in 1943 for services in organising the despatch of aircraft for the North African invasion. He rose to become a Group Captain and, at the end of the war, was Staff Officer to the Vice-Chief of Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Douglas Evill. He stayed in the RAF and, in the early 1950s, was based in Singapore with the Far East Flying Boat Wing flying Sunderlands. He left the service in 1959 and is now in business in West London.*

*When Peter Hartley was discharged from hospital after several weeks, he was posted back to the U.K. He did a refresher course on Spitfires and was given command of No. 54 Squadron. He was soon posted to the Middle East with a Hurricane wing, later going as C.O. to Beirut. His last RAF posting was with the Air Ministry Directorate based at Marshall's Airport, Cambridge. He then owned a market-garden in Cambridgeshire, and is now growing flowers and tomatoes in Devon.*

*Flying Officer John Waters subsequently served as CFI at Upavon (during which time he was awarded the Air Force Cross), later becoming Station Commander at Hullavington. He left the Air Force in 1947, a Wing Commander. He moved into civil aviation in the Middle East, and in 1954, returned to the United Kingdom to work for several years with Charity Consultants. Tragically, after an accident, he died in a London hospital on January 18, 1971.*

*The other four pilots did not survive the war. Flight Lieutenant Peter Keeble was, as we have seen, shot down and killed during the battle of Malta on July 16, 1940.*

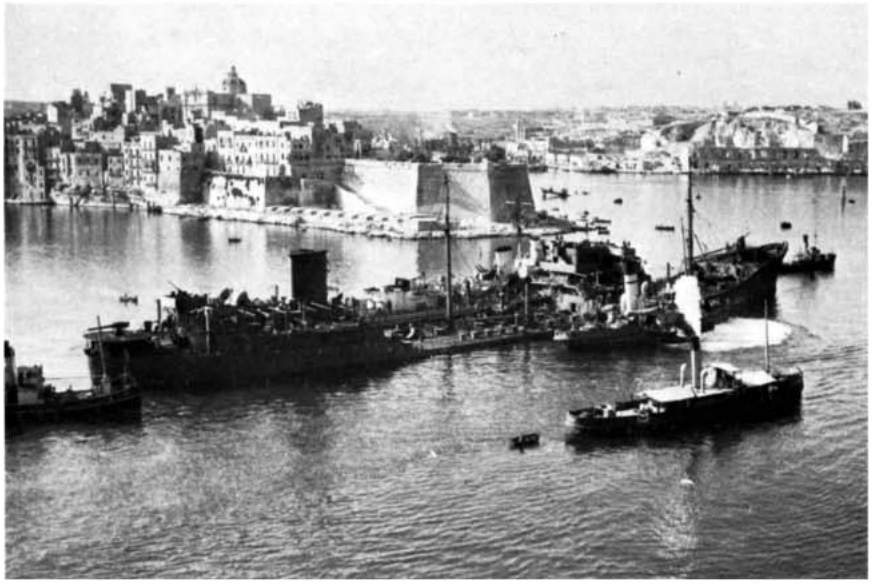
*Flight Lieutenant Peter Alexander was killed while serving with No. 202 Squadron in Gibraltar on January 21, 1942. He is buried in Gibraltar North Front Cemetery, Plot 2, Row B, Joint Grave No. 1.*

*Squadron Leader Alan Martin failed to return from a Bomber Command raid on Germany on August 26, 1941 whilst serving with No. 40 Squadron. He was 27. He was buried in Belgium at Handzame Cemetery, Grave No. 516.*

*Flight Lieutenant William 'Timber' Woods, DFC, served with No. 80 Squadron in Greece. He was shot down on April 20, 1941 and now lies buried in Grave 20 in Row A, Plot 4 of Phaleron War Cemetery in Greece. He was 28.*

*It is difficult, thirty-five years after the events when many of the participants in the air battle have either died or dispersed throughout the world, to get to the bottom of the 'Faith, Hope and Charity' legend. Certainly the phrase was in use officially by 1944, but Group Captain Burges and Wing Commander Hartley, the only surviving members of the original Station Flight, have no knowledge of it being used in June 1940. In fact, as George Burges explained, apart from the first few days, they only flew two Gladiators at a time, so a three-pronged phrase was only relevant during the first weeks' fighting. Kenneth Poolman, who wrote 'Faith, Hope and Charity' in 1954 when memories were clearer, attributes the phrase to Flying Officer John Waters. We contacted his twin brother, Graham (ex V-force Chindits), but he told the editor that he had never heard his brother mention it. Kenneth Poolman himself can add no more to that which he wrote in the book, which was based on what he believed was correct in 1954.*

*Checks with personal flying log books reveal that ten various Gladiator numbers appear regularly, N5519/20/21/24/25/27/29/30/31 and 33. Unlike the individual aircraft records which are meticulously maintained and preserved in London for every Royal Air Force aircraft, the records for these Naval Sea Gladiators cannot be traced. We do know they were part of a construction batch of sixty. Certainly the sole survivor, 'Faith', N5520, was flown by George Burges, Peter Hartley and John Waters.*



**The arrival of the last of the five ships—the battered Texaco tanker Ohio. Launched on April 20, 1940, she was the only tanker that had a chance on the Malta run, having a speed of 16 knots. On August 15, 1942 she was towed into Grand Harbour.**

# The People's war

Much has been written about the Battle of Britain; little about the Battle of Malta. Perhaps, because of this, the sufferings of the Maltese people during two and a half years of constant bombing, day and night, have not been given the prominence they deserve.

A few statistics remind us of the facts. In the Battle of Britain, the Luftwaffe called on three German Luftflotte; in the Battle for Malta one German Luftflotte was used — and almost the whole of the Italian Air Force. Bearing in mind that the total area of the former target is nearly five hundred times as great as Malta it could be argued that the German attack was *over 150 times as heavy.* In the first four months of 1942, the weight of bombs dropped on to a few carefully selected targets reached 10,000 tons; twenty-five times as much as fell on Coventry on the night of November 14, 1940.

With 300 plus German sorties a day being engaged by six or less fighters, the odds cannot be argued. Denis Barnham records in 'One Man's Window' that on several occasions no serviceable fighters could be raised at all! Another pilot in summing up the battle, did not mince his words: *'It all makes the Battle of Britain and fighter sweeps seem like child's play in comparison'.*

The invasion of Malta scared Hitler because, we are told, of the numerous dry stone walls which criss-cross the island dividing up the land into small fields. None of these fields were large enough to land aircraft or gliders and oil drums provided additional obstructions. Any invasion would therefore depend on the capture of the three airfields. Whilst the airfields together with the Naval Dockyard and Harbour, provided the main bombing targets, because of the proximity of civilian property, especially surrounding Grand Harbour where the population is dense, destruction on a large scale was inevitable.

The Battle of Malta is referred to by the Maltese as the Second Siege; the first having taken place in 1565. January 16, 1941 marks the beginning of the siege proper and, although 200 houses were destroyed and 500 damaged on that day, due to the extensive preparation that had been carried out in digging rock shelters and caves, only 63 civilians were killed during the whole of January. The anti-invasion preparations included defacing every milestone on the island. Air raid warnings were given by sirens and the raising of a red flag over the Governor's Palace and Auberge de Castille.

**Above: Looking north on Kingsway, the main street in Valletta, capital of Malta, rubble blocks the doorway of Carmela Cassar on the extreme right (IWM). Below: Carmela is now open for business on traffic-free Kingsway. The day after we took our comparison the street was renamed Republic Street!**

**Left: Defaced milestones still line many of the smaller roads in Malta; obliterated so that they would be of no help to an invader. Below: Many shelters were cut in solid rock, and remain bricked up today—these are in the Lascaris 'great ditch'.**

Left: The main street of Floriana, St. Anne's, guarded by the defiant lion (IWM). Above: The lion jumped a few yards backwards in 1956 so is now just out of the picture.

Left: The General Post Office in Merchants Street, Valetta, hit at the height of the battle in 1942 (IWM). Above: Expertly restored, now the Ministry of Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

Left: Looking down Kingsway from the Porta Reale Bridge. The ruined Opera House can be seen on the right (IWM). Above: A grand new shopping centre is currently being built at Kingsgate.

Left: The Opera House was hit by a parachute mine on April 7, 1942 (IWM). Above: Today, the striking ruin has been left as a reminder of the Second Seige of Malta.

Left: On the corner of Kingsway and South Street, Gopaldas was bombed out of business in May, 1942 (IWM). Above: Today, rebuilt, he is open again, next to the same Wembley Store.

Left: The Governor's dining room in the Palace, hit in February 1942. The paintings had been removed for safe keeping (IWM). Above: Our picture shows the restored dining room with paintings of George III by Gaetano Calleja (XVIII-XIX c.) on the end wall and an undated painting of H.M. the Queen. The UK gave £10m to Malta in 1942 for reconstruction work and a further £20m in July 1946.

Left: An air raid warning has just sounded and these Maltese workmen run for shelter (IWM). Above: We searched a long time for this location—now the Police, Fire and Mechanical Transport Section in Floriana.

It was probably the continuous bombing and lack of adequate food that symbolise the greatest trials the population had to face. By 1942 the shortage of food was critical and starvation, the ultimate weapon of any siege, could have accomplished what the bombing had not. On March 11, 1942 the first Victory Kitchen opened at Rabat. They multiplied quickly. Each centre served about 200 people with one hot meal a day, generally of goats' meat. The fuel shortage for cooking was so great that in the end only Victory Kitchens were allowed to use the wood available from bombed houses.

When war came to the island in 1940, the Governor of Malta was Lieutenant-General William Dobbie and he worked unceasingly in the islands defence during the first two years of the struggle. In April 1942, Winston Churchill records that it was apparent 'that the gallant Governor was worn out and that a new one must be found'. Before he left, recognition of the way the Maltese people had withstood the siege came on April 15, 1942 in a handwritten letter from King George VI to the Governor. It announced the award of the highest decoration for civilian gallantry — the decoration that King George VI himself instituted at the end of the Battle of Britain in 1940 — the George Cross had been awarded to the island of Malta. The George Cross is only awarded 'for acts of the greatest heroism or of the most conspicuous courage in circumstances of extreme danger'. Such was the sacrifice made by the people of Malta.

The man chosen to take over from Lieutenant-General Dobbie was already used to fighting with his back to the wall — at Dunkirk and later at Gibraltar. On May 7, General, The Viscount Gort, V.C., took over as Governor; three days later Winston Churchill reiterated the position over Malta: 'We are determined that Malta shall not be allowed to fall . . . The starving out of this fortress would involve the surrender of over 30,000 men . . . Its possession would give the enemy a clear and sure bridge to Africa, with all the consequences flowing from that'.

The arrival of the Santa Marija convoy with the crippled *Ohio* on August 15, 1942 had a profound effect on the population as these were the first ships to have fought their way to the island in months.

Then the actual presentation of the George Cross came on September 13, 1942 in the Palace Square, when Lord Gort handed the award to the Chief Justice, Sir George Borg on behalf of the nation.

The siege was finally raised on November 20 when a convoy of merchant ships (Operation Stoneage) reached Malta safely from Egypt. Under an air umbrella of Beaufighters and Spitfires, the long line of ships reached Grand Harbour. The terraces of the Barracca Gardens, rooftops and every possible vantage point in Valletta and the surrounding Three Cities were crowded with islanders to greet their arrival. They cheered; they sang; naval bands played the ships in under the roar of patrolling fighters. It was the first of many convoys to follow to restock the islands' larder — the island was safe. The following year brought the symbols of victory to the people of Malta.

BUCKINGHAM PALACE

The Governor
Malta.

To honour her brave people
I award the George Cross to the
Island Fortress of Malta to bear
witness to a heroism and devotion
that will long be famous in history.

George R.I.

April 15th 1942.

**Left: The Governor, Lord Gort, V.C., presents the George Cross to Sir George Borg, Chief Justice, who received it on behalf of the people of Malta (IWM). Above: We stood on the same spot in May 1975.**

# Visit of H.M.King George VI

H.M. King George VI, landing at Customs House' steps on June 20, 1943, is greeted by Lord Gort (IWM).

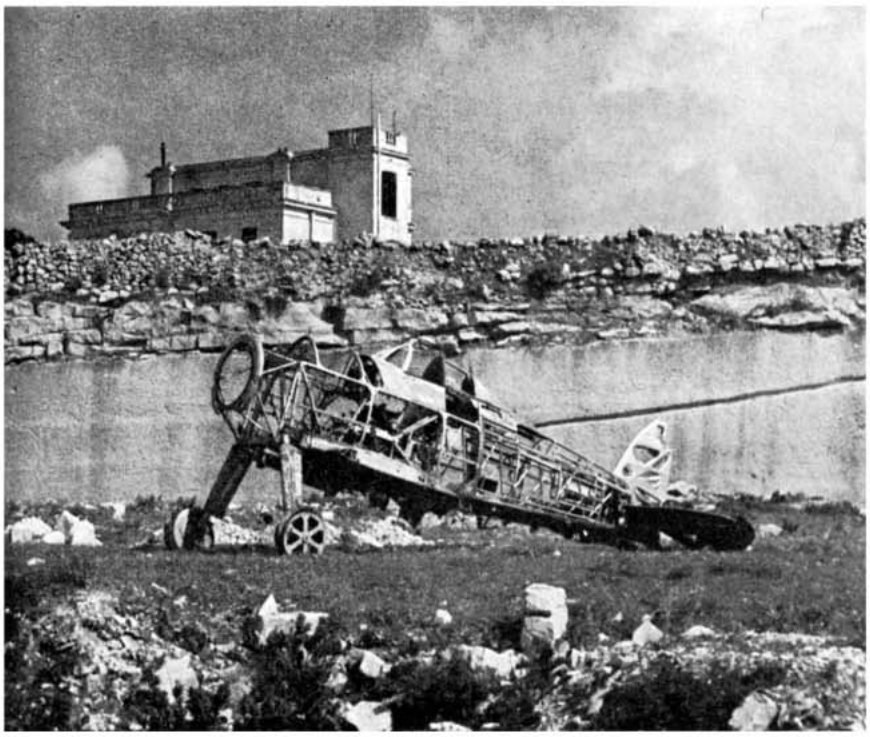
Left: The King also visited Senglea where the parish priest, Monseignor Brincat, showed him the damaged town (IWM). Above: The gates to the dock have been moved back and the 1st Maritime Battery of the Royal Malta Artillery now occupy the buildings. Below: The stone, unveiled on Customs House' steps exactly a year later, recording the visit of the King.

Above: Lord Gort (who died in March, 1946) is promoted to Field-Marshal (IWM).Right, The Ambassadors Red Room at the Palace today.

# Presentation of 'Faith'

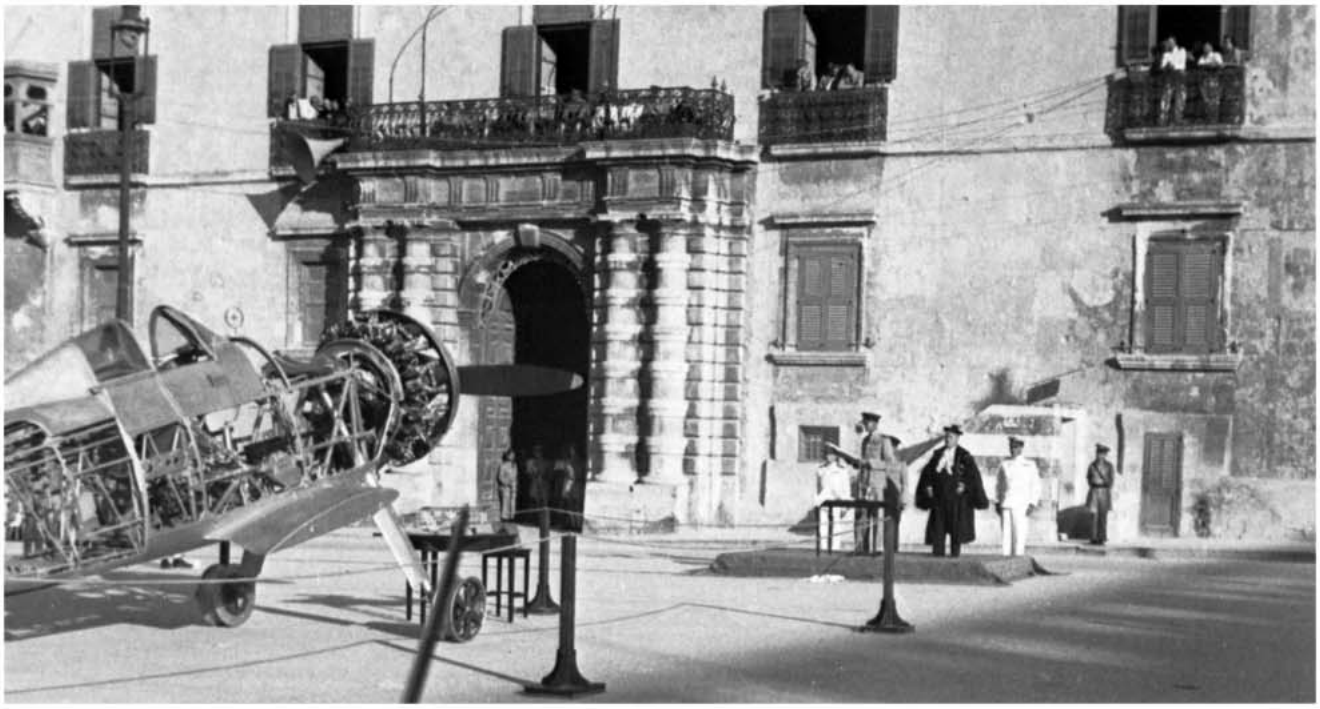
Almost a year after the siege was broken, came the presentation of the one surviving Gladiator. Earlier, the fuselage of a Gladiator, N5520 which had been wrecked by a bomb whilst in a hangar at Hal Far, was found in the aircraft scrap at the Aircraft Repair Section at Kalafrana.

At 6.00 p.m. on September 3, 1943, Air Vice-Marshal Sir Keith Park walked from the Palace entrance to the square where a guard of honour presented arms. In the middle of the square stood the skeleton of 'Faith', minus wings and painted silver. In his speech the Air Vice-Marshal outlined the accomplishments of the first small fighter force symbolised by the Gladiator. It is significant that the Italian records consulted after the war showed that during the time that the Station Flight fought alone, the Italians estimated Malta's fighting strength at twenty-five machines. On behalf of the RAF, Sir Keith then presented the aircraft to Sir George Borg who accepted on behalf of the people of Malta. 'Faith' was then put on display in the armoury of the Palace. There she remained until 1974.



**Below: The presentation of 'Faith' by Sir Keith Park to Sir George Borg in Palace Square. Above: Except for the plaques on the walls recording special events, the Palace is unchanged.**

**Top: The skeleton of N5520 on a piece of waste ground below Kalafrana House in 1943. Above: We were determined to find the location which, in the end, proved surprisingly easy.**



# The Surrender of the Italian fleet

**Top: Italian ships in St. Paul's Bay photographed from Uppa Bugibba opposite Street E. St. Paul's Island is in the background—note the boom defence has been censored. Above: The exact view to be seen in May 1975.**

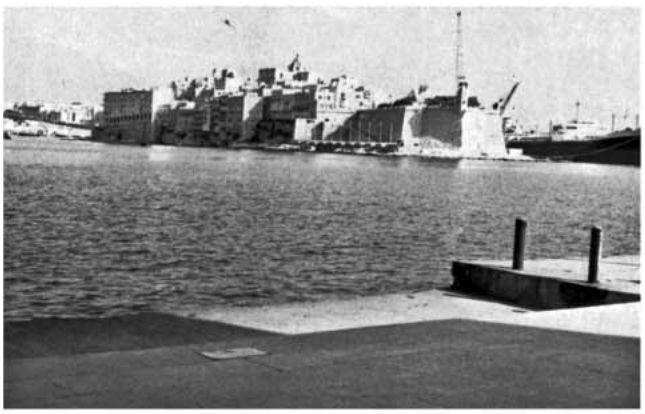
Later that September, came one of the great rewards for the islanders when the Italians surrendered, and their Naval Fleet was ordered to sail for Malta—the very place they had tried so hard to subdue.

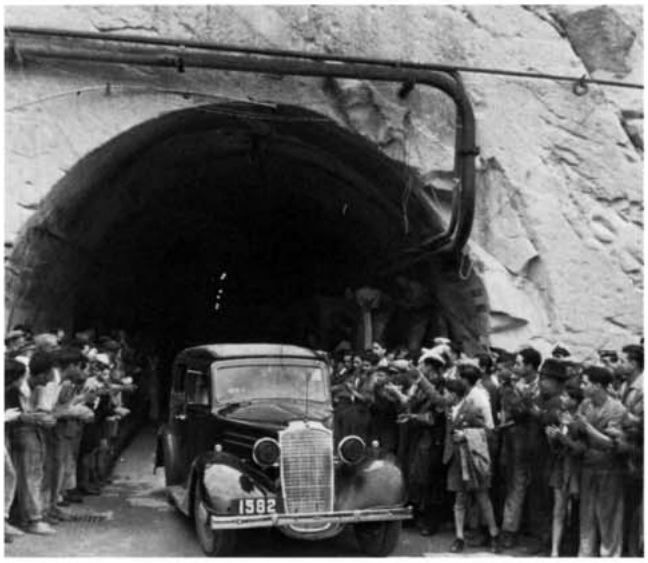
The Allies had landed in Sicily in July. In September an armistice was signed with Italy and landings on the mainland began. Mussolini was interned by his countrymen and King Emmanuel had assumed control. On September 8, when the armistice was announced the Italian Navy left Genoa, Spezia and Taranto.

Captain Harry Butcher, General Eisenhower's personal aide, on board *HMS Warspite* described the event:

When we reached the harbour of St. Paul's around 9 a.m. on Saturday 11th, we found two other Italian battleships and some cruisers and destroyers which had arrived from Taranto. We parked our contingent alongside, but first had the *Savoia* and the two battleships come abreast the *Warspite,* whose crew came to attention as the bosun's whistle was sounded. The Italians likewise were at attention. Their decks were colourful with their blue uniforms, red lifebelts with water container attached. When they replied to our bosun's whistle, I swear theirs had an operatic trill. The *Warspite* continued into Grand Harbour, where she was made fast to buoys near the Customs House. We learned that Admiral da Zara, senior officer since the death of their C-in-C, but who had been in the Taranto portion, was to come ashore at 4 o'clock, when he would meet Admiral Cunningham. A guard of honour from the *Warspite* was placed in front of the Customs House landing for the Italian Admiral. I stayed to see this ceremony and to make pictures of it. The Eyetie was brought ashore in the Admiral's brass-stacked barge, from which he stepped briskly, saluting continuously, shook hands with Commodore Dick, who had been sent by Admiral Cunningham to escort him by car to the Admiral's office. The defeated Admiral quickly, and in a businesslike manner, reviewed the guard and soon was whisked away with Commodore Dick in the car which he had been deliberately provided so he could see the damage Italian bombs had done to Malta. He could have been walked sixty feet up a circular and deeply worn staircase to the Admiral's quarters, but 'ABC', as I find he is frequently called in the Navy, wanted to impress the Italians with the ruins of Malta, for which they are partly responsible.

**Below left: Admiral da Zara introduces senior Italian Naval Officers to Commodore Dick, on the Customs House' steps, September 11, 1943 (IWM). Below: The steps today — the plaque commemorates another naval officers' visit — that of King George VI.**



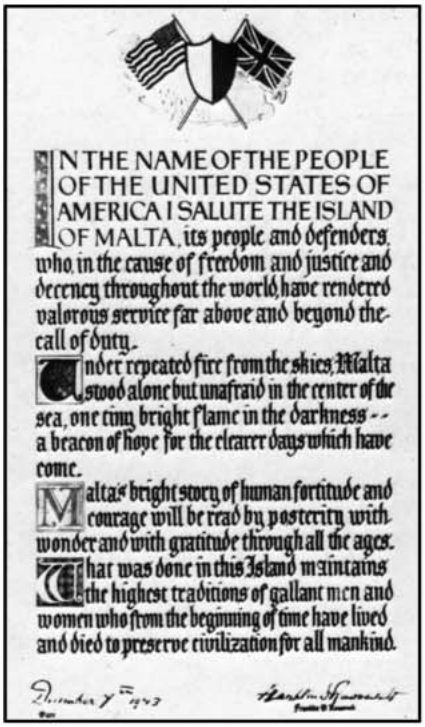


Left: Winston Churchill visited Malta in November 1943 where, on the 19th, he was driven from Parlatario Wharf via the quarter-mile long Coradino tunnel (IWM). These tunnels were used as dressing stations and a signboard still remained when we visited Malta Dry Docks, the company which took over the Dockyard in 1959. By the time this article is in print, the tunnel will have been demolished for the construction of a new No. 6 Dock. We traced the 14hp Vauxhall No. 1582; it was requisitioned from its owner in February 1943; released in December 1944, and finally scrapped in 1962. Below: How No. 4 Dock looked in 1943 and as it is today.

# Winston Churchill...

# ...and President Roosevelt

The President, Franklin D. Roosevelt, flew to Malta on Wednesday, December 8. Included in the party were Generals Eisenhower, Spaatz and Bedell Smith. When he arrived, the President personally presented Lord Gort with an illuminated scroll as a tribute to the islanders from the people of America. This was later displayed in the Palace Square.

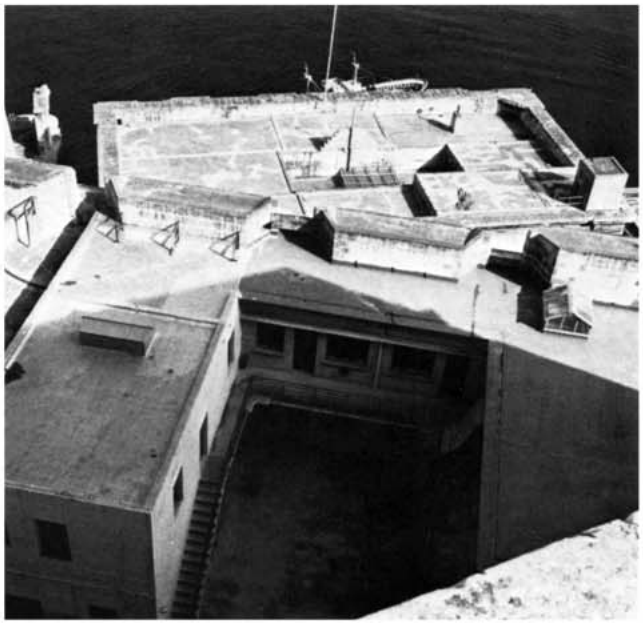


IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA I SALUTE THE ISLAND OF MALTA, its people and defenders, who in the cause of freedom and justice and decency throughout the world, have rendered valorous service far above and beyond the call of duty.

Under repeated fire from the skies, Malta stood alone but unafraid in the center of the sea, one tiny bright flame in the darkness -- a beacon of hope for the clearer days which have come.

Malta's bright story of human fortitude and courage will be read by posterity with wonder and with gratitude through all the ages. What was done in this Island maintains the highest traditions of gallant men and women who from the beginning of time have lived and died to preserve civilization for all mankind.

December 7th 1943



# Malta today . . .

**Left: The Customs House overlooking Grand Harbour, immediately above War Headquarters, was one of the targets in 1942 (IWM). Above: At great risk to life and limb an exact comparison, including the wall in the foreground is possible today.**

*As everyone knows, Malta has become a centre for holiday tourists. Naturally this has meant a large growth in new hotels and villas but for the visitor in search of World War II nostalgia, this can still be found.*

*Initially our visit concentrated on the airfields. Luqa now used jointly by the RAF and civilian airlines has been extended out of all recognition to its former self with new terminal buildings and hangars. Nevertheless we were able to pinpoint the site of the Wellington in its pen quite easily. It is difficult to say if any of the stone-walled fields which surround the aerodrome and the road to Hal Far were originally blast pens; certainly some must have performed that role but no stones could be found showing the traces of pen numbers.*

*The main NW-SE runway at Luqa is being extended under a Government programme so that the island can accommodate Jumbo jets. This extension will obliterate Safi Landing Ground completely, although we were not too late to photograph the remains of old hangars being used by the construction firms.*

*Hal Far, home of the Station Fighter Flight, is still used by the Royal Air Force. The photograph of the engine-less 'Faith' in front of a villa in the wartime publication 'Air Battle of Malta' had always intrigued the editor. We were determined to trace the location although it looked well-nigh impossible. However this proved much easier than anticipated, as the house stands not one hundred yards from the road which joins the aerodrome with the old RAF Base at Kalafrana — up which the Gladiators would have been brought. There, the scene had changed little, and we matched our comparisson exactly.*

*The old RAF Aerodrome at Ta'Qali, later used by post-war jets, was handed back to the Malta Government on February 15, 1968 and is now abandoned. Part is occupied by the Mdina Glass Company, and at the eastern end, bulldozers were at work ripping up the runway for the building of an industrial estate. The post-war control tower remains and the rock shelters are still to be seen. At weekends it provides a perfect drag-racing strip for the local enthusiasts to let off steam.*

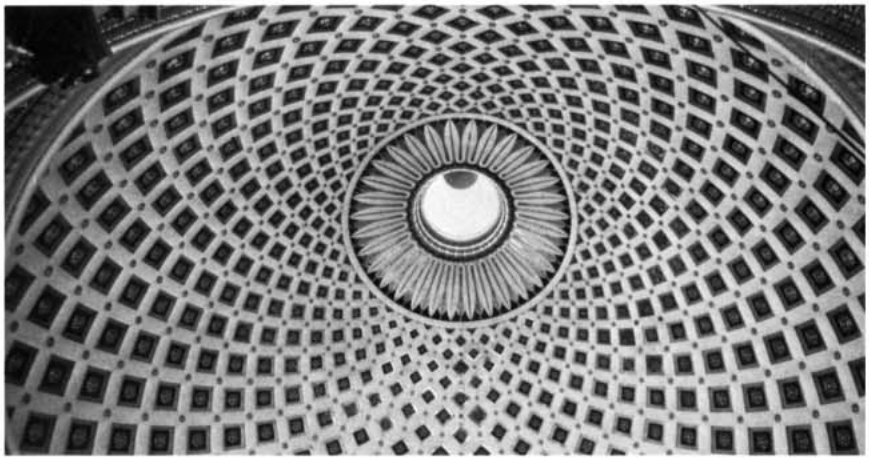
*Qrendi, of which we had a good set of pictures taken in 1942 of the opening ceremony — at which Sir Keith Park 'beat up the aerodrome in his Hurricane — is likewise abandoned. It was later used as an ammunition and arms depot; today the E-W runway is divided off into small pens, the use for which we were unable to ascertain. The control tower is used as an office and surrounding blast pens for poultry farming.*

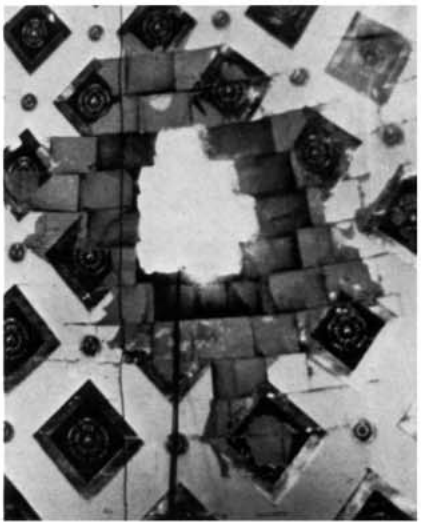
*The main military establishments are still sited on the north side of the island with the Armed Forces of Malta occupying St. Patrick's Barracks and No. 41 Commando, St. Andrew's Barracks, now referred to as Pembroke. It was here that a wartime hospital had been located and bombed. We had a series of pictures showing the ruined buildings, and we took several interesting comparisons. Rubble from the demolished buildings can still be seen in our photographs.*

*We obtained special permission to enter Lascaris Barracks, part of which is situated in the rock beneath Valletta itself. It was here that War Headquarters were situated and we hoped to be able to trace the old operations room. A new central block made some of the comparisons difficult but, with the help of Lieutenant-Commander Mike Phillips, we were able to turn the clock back. Lascaris Barracks are still used by the Royal Navy as Mediterranean HQ and we found that the old operations room was still used occasionally for NATO exercises.*

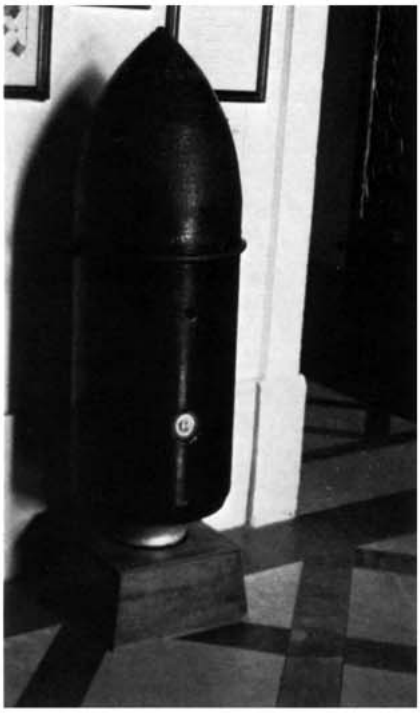
*In Valletta, we spent several days matching the photographs taken in the 1940s.*

**We had fun reconstructing a day in the life of Christina. First, she collected dinner at a Victory Kitchen (now Cordina's Emporium) and . . .**





**Above: The hole in the ceiling of Mosta Church made by the 500kg bomb (below) on April 9, 1942. Left: The roof was expertly repaired—no trace of the damage can be seen today.**



*We had some fun matching the series of photographs showing Christina, the Fighter Control girl off-duty, who was, we understand, the girl friend of a photographic reconnaissance pilot and who stayed in Malta after the war. We then took other photographs around the Opera House still in ruins, and Kingsway, the famous main street of Valletta, closed to traffic in 1974. The very next day Kingsway was renamed Republic Street!*

*We climbed the stairs to the Palace lookout, still used to check on shipping entering the harbour, although the Maltese Armed Forces have now taken over from the Royal Navy. Although a new flagpole has replaced the old, wartime one, Major Busuttil, who accompanied us, arranged a re-enactment of the raising of the red air-raid warning flag. As this is now used to give a warning of unexploded bombs we only raised it a few feet!*

*Whilst on the subject of bombs, the extension of the Luqa runway has so far caused fourteen unexploded bombs to be uncovered, the majority being 250kg. These are deactivated by the Royal Malta Artillery Explosive Ordnance Disposal Unit using conventional British Army methods (see After the Battle No. 3) In the four years to April 1975 the following ordnance has been handled by the Bomb Disposal team, currently under the command of Captain Cauchi Inglott:*

*137 shells 3in-6in calibre; 5 shells above 6in calibre; 118 40mm shells; 184 20mm shells; 25 2in and 15 3in mortar bombs; 9 German butterfly bombs and various grenades and pyrotechnics. German bombs found number: seven 55kg; two 70kg; nine 250kg; four 500kg and four 1kg incendiary. One 15kg bomb and seventeen 2kg anti-personnel bombs of Italian manufacture have been found.*

*The rocky construction of the island has meant that little remains to be excavated of aircraft crashes; this is why the War Museum have concentrated on sea searches. Here, the Spitfire and Stuka (see pages 40, 41) are only the beginning, their latest project is the recovery of an Italian SM79.*

*The wrecks under the sea are not only confined to aircraft and ships. The American Forces dumped jeeps and surplus equipment off Benghisa Point; some of which has already been traced by skin divers. But what happened to the hundreds of British aircraft written off and the remains of the Axis crashed aircraft? Read what Denis Barnham had to say in 1942:*

*'I have been drawing and painting this morning. I have been painting one of the monuments to the last bomber force we had here — one of the wreck pits on the side of the haunted valley of Safi — a stupendous subject, although my painting was a failure — a deep pit cut into the golden rock and filled to overflowing with the blue-black wreckage of Wellingtons, Marylands, Swordfish, Hudsons and many other aircraft, all rustling together quietly like dried bones.'*

*Quarries abound on the island as the stone removed from them form the main building material. This particular quarry was filled in with earth when a Halifax, landing at Luqa, nearly joined the old wrecks already there. How many aircraft may still be buried no one knows, but the War Museum are fully aware of the possibilities.*

*On April 9, 1942, a bomb pierced the dome — the third largest in the world — of Mosta Church. A congregation of three hundred were present when the bomb and debris fell on them at 4.40 p.m. Miraculously the 500kg bomb failed to explode and it was defused by No. 128 Bomb Disposal Unit of the Royal Engineers. The bomb is now displayed in the*

**. . . then, with the help of Lisa, the little Maltese girl from the next flat, fetched a bucket with the day's supply of water from the . . .**

*church. The damage to the roof has been so skilfully repaired that no trace of the bomb's entry can be seen today.*

*Because of the rocky ground, it was not practical to dig individual graves and the first pilot killed, Flight Lieutenant Peter Keeble, is buried in Collective Grave No. 2 in Capuccini Naval Cemetery. Only five Italian war dead from the Second World War remain on the island today, buried at Capuccini. One hundred and twenty-one Germans were exhumed in 1960 and reburied in the German War Cemetery at Cagliari on Sardinia (owned by Italy). All that remain are five German graves at Addolorata dating from the First World War. On November 26, 1964, the remains of three Italians were removed from Comino (a small island between Malta and Gozo). They were carried back to Italy with full military honours on the Corvette Airone.*

*The George Cross must be the focal point of any visit to the island. At the end of the war, the award was put on display in the Palace armoury whilst the citation, handwritten by King George VI, was deposited in the National Library, in Kingsway, sorry, Republic Street. Three years ago it was decided that it would be more appropriate to display the Cross alongside the citation and it was therefore taken to the Library. Here it can be seen today. When we arrived, no one could tell us the exact words of the inscription on the obverse and so Dr. Depasquale very kindly removed the award from its case. Still with its*

*original blue ribbon, now faded, the inscription reads:*

*To*
*The Island of Malta*
*15 April 1942*

*Although we made extensive enquiries, we could not trace the whereabouts of the illuminated scroll presented to the Island by President Roosevelt in 1943.*

*One final story remains to be told — that of the old lady who fought her way through to Malta in August 1942 — the Ohio — the crippled survivor of 'Operation Pedestal'.*

*Not long after her precious cargo had been removed, she was towed to another part of the harbour and, later, had broken in half at her moorings. Attempts were made to join the halves but local facilities proved unable to do the job satisfactorily and the expense of towing the halves a thousand miles to Gibraltar or Alexandria too great to justify. She was used as a makeshift store and later fitted out to house Yugoslav troops. Then on September 19, 1946 her future was decided. The two rust-streaked halves were towed to deep water ten miles from Malta to where the executioner, a destroyer, was waiting.*

*After the first shots the rear portion, weakened by German bombs, soon disappeared from sight. The buoyant forepart refused to sink. Armour piercing shells blasted the bridgework and the shored up amidships section where she had been struck by a German torpedo. Slowly she sank beneath the waves . . . the bows pointing skyward in a final farewell . . . then she was gone.*

. . . local community tap in Britannia St. . . .

Hallo! . . . Wot no water!

**The remains of the last three Italians to leave the islands are carried to the Italian corvette. Their bodies had been washed ashore on Comino Island after the Italian Naval attack on Grand Harbour (Times of Malta).**

**The saviour of Malta, the once proud Ohio, is towed to her death. (Times of Malta).**

# The Italian Naval attack on Grand Harbour

Twelve days before the end of the First World War, a turning point in naval history occurred with an undersea Commando attack on Pola Harbour by Italian swimmers. The mining and sinking of the *Viribus Unitis* was to mark the first success of a new form of naval warfare which was to be developed, perfected and used by the Italian Navy so successfully in World War II.

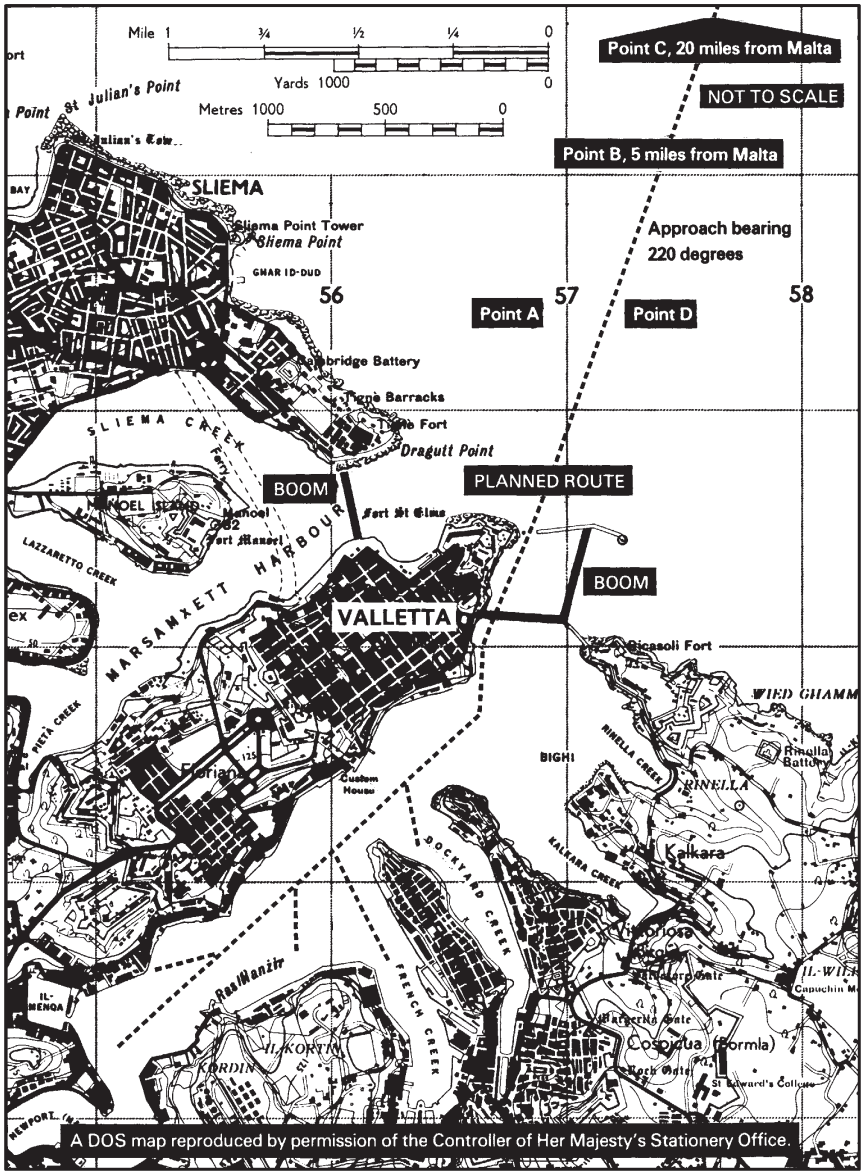
The appointment of capitano di fregata (Commander) Vittorio Moccagatta in 1941, to command the 'Tenth' or 'X Light Flotilla' as the specialised branch was called, marked the beginning of intensive training, recruitment and equipment. The X Flotilla consisted of two divisions—surface and underwater. The surface division, which carried out the attack on Malta, was commanded by capitano di corvetta (Lieutenant-Commander) Giorgio Giobbe.

Abortive attacks on Alexandria and Gibraltar harbours had been followed by a successful operation in Suda Bay using explosive motor boats (barchini esplosivi). The Italian force claimed to have sunk the *York*, but the British Navy, it seems, refused to give them credit for the attack, preferring to state she had been sunk by German bombing!

The barchini were flat-bottomed 16ft. motor boats powered by an Alfa-Romeo outboard motor which could give a speed of 32mph. The bows of the boat contained a 300kg charge which could be set to explode on impact or by hydrostatic pressure. The pilot aimed the boat at his target, locked the rudder and ejected himself backwards on his backrest, which would keep him afloat and shield him from the underwater shock-wave of the explosion. When the boat hit its target, a ring of explosive charges split the boat in half—the fore-part sinking and exploding at the predetermined depth.

In April 1941, preparations began for an attack on the British naval base at Malta. Grand Harbour, probably the best natural harbour in the world, consists of several anchorages called 'creeks'. It was chosen by the Italians in spite of the formidable, massive stone forts guarding the entrance. The forts of St. Elmo and Ricasoli guard the main harbour, whilst Fort Tigne covers the adjacent Marsamxett Harbour.

**Top: MAS 451, one of the participants in the raid on Malta, at speed. Above: One of the Bofors protecting the harbour entrance. The boom has been towed aside (behind the leading ship) to allow a convoy to enter harbour (IWM). Below: The same gun emplacement today—Fort St. Elmo is out of the picture to the left.**



**One of the ranging towers still standing at Fort St. Elmo which controlled the fire of the 6-pdr guns sited to defend the harbour entrance.**

A stone mole projecting from Fort St. Elmo protected the harbour entrance which could be closed by an anti-submarine net. Near to where the mole joined the fort, a steel-lattice bridge on two steel piers spanned a channel used in peacetime by small boats to enter the harbour, but which was then protected by a steel net hanging from the bridge. The plan was for the barchini to enter the harbour and to be set on collision courses with any shipping present.

Capitano di fregata Moccagatta himself took part in three reconnaissances made by two motor boats to check on the harbour entrance, defences and the chances of approaching unobserved. These took place on May 25 and 28 and one on June 26, immediately prior to the attack, which was scheduled for two days later. In this last reconnaissance he approached to within two miles of the coast and reported that he could distinguish houses in the light of searchlights which had been switched on for an air raid. What he did not discover was that the harbour defences included a surface radar installation—whilst his small force had passed unnoticed, a larger one almost certainly would be detected.

Heavy seas forced the flotilla to abandon the attempt on June 28, and engine trouble aborted a second try on the night of June 30. This setback now meant a delay of a month until the moon would again be favourable for a night attack.

The intervening delay gave maggiore (Major) Teseo Tesei, a dedicated naval engineer, who had developed the two-man human torpedo (SLC), time to plead his case that they be included in the raid. He felt the SLCs could better approach undetected and, instead of entering the harbour by the main entrance, destroy the nets hanging from the mole bridge under the guns of Fort St. Elmo. The barchini could then enter under the bridge. He volunteered to lead the SLCs himself, although he must have realised he had little chance of returning alive from an almost suicide mission.

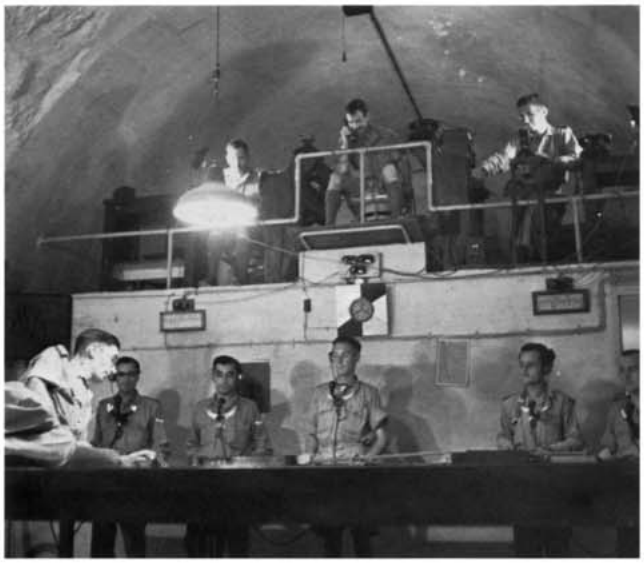
A new plan of attack was drawn up to incorporate maggiore Tesei's ideas. Instead of towing the barchini to Malta as had been tried unsuccessfully on the two earlier occasions, the new plan called for them to be put aboard the *Diana*, a 1568-ton sloop which would also tow an MTL (literally translated as a low-speed tourist motor boat), which in turn would carry as cargo the SLC human torpedoes. The *Diana* would stop and release the small craft when she was within twenty miles of Malta (Point C).

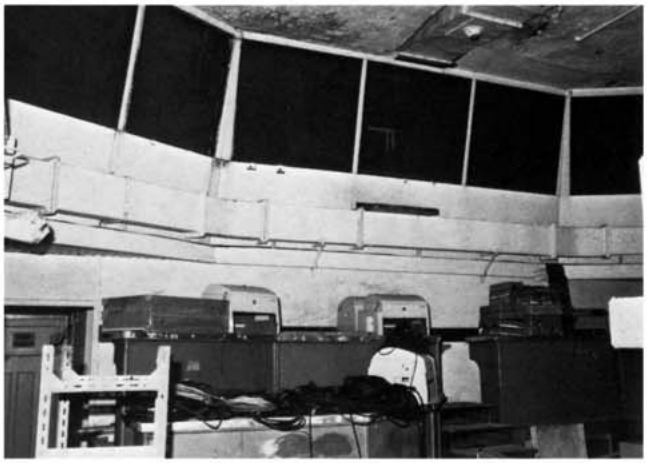
The force therefore would consist of the following:

The *Diana* commanded by capitano di corvetta (Lieutenant-Commander) Mario Di Muro which would tow the MTL, carrying in turn the two SLCs. Maggiore Teseo Tesei with his co-pilot, secondo capo palombaro (Second Chief) Alcide Pedretti in SLC No. 1 were to attack the mole net whilst the second SLC, piloted by tenente di vascello (Captain) Franco Costa and sergente palombaro (Sergeant) Luigi Barla, would attack the submarine base at Manoel Island in Marsamxett Harbour.

The force included two 60ft. Motor Torpedo Boats (MAS) Nos. 451 and 452, with 452 towing a small motor boat (MTSM). MAS 452 commanded by tenente di vascello (Lieutenant) Giobatta Parodi had capitano di fregata Moccagatta on board, and was to lead the flotilla to a point five miles from the harbour (Point B). The MTSM, piloted by capitano di corvetta Giorgio Giobbe, would then be cast off to lead the barchini to point D, 1000 metres from the harbour. The other torpedo boat, MAS 451, commanded by sottotenente di vascello (Sub-Lieutenant) Giorgio Sciolette, would take over towing the MTL, containing the two SLC torpedos, from the *Diana* at point C to be released at point B. From point B, sottonocchiero (Understeersman) Tindaro Paratore, piloting the

**Maggiore Teseo Tesei.**





**Left: The Coastal Defence operations room, part of War Headquarters, deep inside Lascaris Barracks (IWM). Above: After the war, the room was used as the Combined Mediterranean South-East War Room. Our picture shows it in May 1975.**

MTL, using its silent electric engine, would take the two human torpedoes to within 1000 metres of the harbour (point A on map) where they would be cast off. It would then wait for the return of the crews after accomplishing their mission.

The barchini themselves each had separate missions, MTM No. 1 (adjusted to explode 5 metres below sea level) of sottotenente di vascello (Sub-Lieutenant) Carlo Bosio would lead the formation from point A to within 500 metres of the St. Elmo bridge, then through the opening blown in the net into the harbour. MTM No. 2 (adjusted for 1.5 metres) piloted by sottotentente di vascello Roberto Frassetto, would blast the hole in the net if the SLC of maggiore Tesei failed to do so. MTM No. 3 (adjusted for surface explosion) piloted by sottotenente delle armi navali (Sub-Lieutenant) Aristide Carabelli was reserve in case MTM No. 2 failed. MTM No. 4,, segnaltore (Signalman) Vittorio Marchisio; MTM No. 5 secondo capo (2nd Chief) Vincenzo Montanari; MTM No. 6, secondo capo Alessandro Follieri; MTM No. 7 secondo capo Enrico Pedrini and MTM No. 8, nocchiere (Steersman) Pietro Zaniboni, all adjusted for explosion 5 metres below sea level, would attack targets in the harbour whilst MTM No. 9, piloted by capo di terza classe (Chief 3rd Class) Fiorenzo Capriotti (adjusted for surface explosion) would attack any British units attempting to interfere with the attack.

## THE ATTACK

The new date fixed for the attack was the night of July 26. The weather was good with a calm sea as the flotilla set sail from Augusta in Sicily. They arrived exactly on schedule at 11.00 p.m. at point C where the MTMs were unloaded and the *Diana* returned homewards.

As they left the *Diana*, a towing cable fouled the propellor of MAS 451, causing a collision with the MTL. With a four-foot gash in her bow and a fouled propellor, the motor torpedo boat had to be left behind, but shortly after the other boats reached point B, they were joined by 451 which had managed to free herself.

At 2.00 a.m. the MTL led the formation towards the St. Elmo bridge and, at the planned distance of 1000 metres, the engines were stopped and the human torpedoes cast off. The time was 3.00 a.m. — later than planned.

When put in the water, the second SLC floated with a 20-degree tail list. The pumps could not be made to correct the fault and maggiore Tesei ordered tentente di vascello Costa to go back. Maggiore Tesei finally set out at 3.35 a.m. He knew he had to blow the bridge at 4.30 a.m., when a diversionary bombing raid was planned on Mqabba airfield (the Italians' name for Luqa), to draw attention away from the harbour. As he set off towards the mole he told tentente di vascello Costa, 'I will not have time for anything else than take my SLC under the net. At 4.30 a.m. the net has to be blown and it will blow. If it is late I will fuse the explosive for only one minute'. Tenente di vascello Costa knew that Tesei would kill himself to ensure the successful destruction of the net. This was the last anyone saw or heard of maggiore Tesei.

Unknown to the Italian force, the *Diana* had been picked up by the radar when approaching point C at 10.30 p.m. The last radar contact was at 11.00 p.m. as the *Diana* sailed away from Malta. Although the small boats were invisible, the harbour defences and fortresses had been alerted and the men of the Royal Malta Artillery, manning the guns, were ready.

The diversionary air raid came a little early at 4.14 a.m. An explosion was heard at 4.25 a.m. and, assuming (we now know incorrectly) that this was maggiore Tesei's charge exploding, sottotenente dis vascello Bosio in MTM No. 1 signalled the barchini to attack. Sottotenente di vascello Frassetto in No. 2 headed for the bridge and, at 100 metres from the target, set his charge and threw himself into the water. The boat hit the net but failed to explode, so using a torch he signalled to the others the direction of the bridge. Sottotenente delle armi navali Carabelli aimed his boat at the net but had no time to save himself and he was blown up when his boat hit the pier at 4.45 a.m. The force of the explosion was so great that it brought down the left-hand span of the steel bridge, effectively blocking the entrance. Sottotenente di vascello Frassetto, still in the water, tried to signal the other boats but MTM No. 6, with secondo capo Follieri was hit and blown up nearby and Frasetto lost consciousness.

Sergeant Zammit was on duty in Fort St. Elmo overlooking the mole bridge and harbour entrance. He describes the scene in his own words:

'Suddenly I heard the sound of an MTB and although it was still twilight I saw a small MTB three hundred yards away heading towards the breakwater bridge. I gave the alarm and my gun went into action just as the MTB hit the bridge and blew up. Searchlights illuminated the scene. A hundred yards away from the bridge I saw another small craft. I directed the gun on to it and with the first two shots hit it and blew it up. I again directed the gun on to a third one a hundred yards away and with the first few rounds it was destroyed. I saw three others heading towards Grand Harbour. All guns fired at them. One was destroyed and two disabled. About a quarter of an hour later I saw two small suspicious objects at about 2,000 yards away. I directed the gun on to one of them. After ten to fifteen seconds they moved and I opened fire im-

**Capitano di fregata Moccagatta (centre) with members of the X Flotilla.**

**The demolished bridge which effectively blocked the intended route for the MTMs.**

**Above: An MTM barchini goes in to attack. The pilot is sitting on the back-rest which will be jettisoned. Below: Rudder set and engine at full power, the pilot prepares to eject.**

mediately. A couple of seconds later all other guns engaged.

'At this moment I saw them zig-zagging, manoeuvring and cleverly turning about at a high speed to avoid the very heavy punishment. They were sunk.

'The scene of red and green tracers bouncing sky high from the sea, and the noise of the guns together with the shouting and applause of the civilians on the roof-tops and bastions was like a firework display on a festive occasion.

'Just after all this I saw two large MTBs far away and out of range of my gun. These were being engaged by the Hurricanes.'

Segnalatore Marchisio in No. 4 was wounded and thrown into the sea. MTM No. 7 was hit several times trying to reach the harbour and, eventually, was sunk deliberately by secondo capo Pedrini. Nocchiere Zaniboni did the same with his MTM No. 8. Sottotenente di vascello Bosio, wounded in MTM No. 1, set the automatic destruction mechanism but before he could jump clear the boat exploded.

Capo di terza classe Capriotti in MTM No. 9 managed to evade the searchlights and tried to reach the harbour a second time. The boat came under fire and was hit. Jumping into the sea he reached the wounded Marchisio and dragged him to the nearest buoy.

Tenente di vascello Costa, ordered not to take part with his listing SLC, observed the failure of the attack and, after five hours navigation both on the surface and under water, finally reached land only to be captured and made prisoner.

The radar warning had brought the RAF Hurricane IICs of Nos. 126, 185 and 251 Squadrons to readiness and, at first light, they took off. The motor torpedo boats MAS 451 and 452 had turned back from point B when they realised the attack was a failure. Capitano di corvetta Giobbe caught them up in his MTSM and was taken in tow by 452. After proceeding northwards in full daylight as fast as the towed craft permitted, the fighters caught up with them. Whilst the boats were being strafed by the Hurricanes, ten Regia Aeronautica Macchi 200 fighters of No. 54 Squadron appeared to protect the boats. The Italian pilots were outnumbered three or four to one.

On MAS 452 capitano di fregata Moccagatta, capitano di corvetta Giobbi and six others fell at the first bursts of fire. The other eleven men managed to escape on the MTSM and subsequently rejoined the *Diana*.

**Below: The pilot of the MTM climbs onto the back-rest to avoid the effects of the underwater shock-wave from the explosion.**

Although MAS 451 managed to bring down a Hurricane, the boat's petrol tanks were hit; the crew barely had time to leap overboard before she blew up killing four seamen. The nine survivors, most of them wounded, were picked up six hours later by the British and taken prisoner. During the voyage to Malta, they passed the hulk of MAS 452 which earlier had been 'captured' in unusual circumstances by Pilot Officer D. Winton of No. 185 Squadron, flying one of the Hurricanes. This is an extract from the Squadron's log:

'Thirty miles or so out to sea, he was surprised by a Macchi and received such damage to his machine that his fan stopped. Using his speed to gain height, he was able to reach 700

**Above: The demolished right-hand section of the bridge and, left, our comparison. Below: The plaque from MAS 452.**

feet and then baled out, both his parachute and dinghy doing all the things that a kind-hearted M.O. likes them to do. For the next few hours he sunbathed, played with a friendly turtle, wondered who would have his motor-cycle, and then spotted a stationery torpedo boat. He paddled the dinghy with his hands and, finding progress slow, towed it and swam towards the boat. By climbing up the side he was able to peer into it and was confronted by eight very much dead Italians.

'Taking possession of the boat was thus quite easy and as he couldn't start it, he waited, flying the flag at half-mast, since he didn't know which side would rescue him. An Army rescue boat did a circuit round him—almost six hours after he had baled out on an empty stomach—and thinking he was an Italian, also that there was a .5 machine gun on the boat, left him to cool his heels for a time. Before they could return a Swordfish with floats dropped in to pay him a visit and gave him, and the flag, a lift home, where he again took possession of his motor-cycle.'

*Except for the survivors of MAS 452, no other Italians returned from Malta; fifteen men died, including capitano di fregata Moccagatta, and eighteen made prisoner.*

*The British claim to have lost only one Hurricane in the air battle and to have shot down 3 Macchi 200s, whilst the Italians claim to have destroyed four British aircraft for the loss of two.*

*Undoubtedly the Italian ignorance of the presence of early warning radar spelled failure for the raid, even before it started. The courage of the Italians was praised by the Lieutenant-Governor of Malta, Sir Edward Jackson, in an article in the Daily Mirror on October 4, 1941. In 1942 the Diana, which had been built as Mussolini's private yacht in 1940, was torpedoed by a British submarine off Tobruk.*

*Today three reminders of the raid remain in Malta. One of the MTMs failed to sink in the explosions and was towed ashore. There it was repaired and later used as a speedboat. Recently, it was donated by Joseph Bezzina, one of the first members of the Association, to the War Museum. When we saw it it was undergoing restoration by the Logistics Unit of the Armed Forces of Malta under Major Eric Busuttil. Original plans and photographs have been obtained from Italy and soon the boat will be on display in the new War Museum in Fort St. Elmo.*

*In the RMA Officers' Mess at St. Patrick's Barracks, a brass fasces insignia taken from MAS 452 as a memento of its 'capture' by Pilot Officer Winton, is mounted on a polished plaque. It came from No. 185 Squadron.*

*The most dramatic relic of all lies alongside the harbour entrance. The destroyed section of the steel bridge was removed, together with the undamaged span, and not replaced. However, the rusty iron piers from the centre section remain; almost a memorial to maggiore Tesei, who died on this very spot, and to his courageous comrades.*

**The sole surviving MTM undergoing restoration at the Logistics Unit workshops ready for display in the War Museum.**

# AFTER THE BATTLE

## PRESERVATION

# The Malta Scene

**'FAITH'**

During the making of 'Battle of Britain', Chief Technician 'Curly' Alcock worked for five months as technical adviser on the making of the film. In 1973, then serving at RAF Luqa in his trade of aircraft fitter/airframe, he was again technical adviser when the RAF, with the permission of the Maltese government, raised the remains of the Spitfire from Marsalforn Bay, Gozo. With his enthusiastic background for authenticity and preservation, it was perhaps natural that the Maltese museums' department did not lose the opportunity to use his skills in the restoration of 'Faith'.

It had been felt that the display of the aircraft, alongside the armour of the Knights of Malta, was not in keeping with its surroundings and the Gladiator had been removed from the Palace armoury and stored at Fort St. Elmo, pending the opening of the proposed museum.

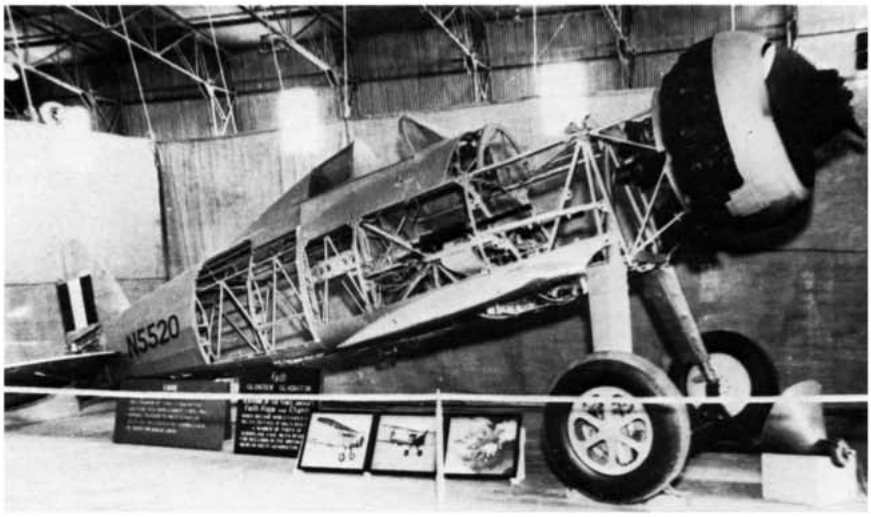
When the go-ahead for the restoration was given by the AOC Malta and Luqa station commander, 'Faith' was moved to the RAF at Luqa. There 'Curly' assessed the problem and materials required.

The first job was to remove the propeller, engine and flying controls and strip the aircraft of old paint and fabric, during which stage the No. 5520 was discovered on the bottom fairings, rear of the tail wheel.

The port lower longeron was completely sheared aft of the engine bulkhead, most of the stringers were missing or badly twisted and the tailplane and elevators had ribs and trailing edges broken. These were repaired where possible or replaced by wood. Panels, fairings, formers, flying wires and gun ports etc. were manufactured on site as authentically as possible. Major items included the making of a rudder, spinner and canopy. The original tyres were used on both main wheels, the tubes being replaced and pressured only to 18 lbs. The only item replaced from stock was an identification light at the rear of the canopy which was manufactured in 1948 and catalogued as a Beaver aircraft spare.

Sergeant Bill Feeney, a painter and doper by trade, carried out the work of refabrication of the complete aircraft and spraying it to wartime finish in dark sea grey, slate grey and duck egg blue. Corporal Rajah, an engine fitter, also assisted in various aspects of the work. The Armament Flight restored the two remaining machine guns to full working order.

The work started at the end of April and finished in time for the Battle of Britain church service in September. Chief Technician Alcock has told us that 'man-hours cannot be fully assessed as this was voluntary work and at times, particularly towards the target date, one had to burn the midnight oil. When finished the Gladiator looked as good as new, except that we were unable to manufacture and fit wings. We felt it had been well worthwhile to restore such an historic "Old Lady"—though in so doing one tends to become a quite professional scrounger!'




**Above: Gladiator N5520, after being rescued in 1943 by a fitter at Ta'Qali, Corporal William Brown, was refurbished in 1961 by No. 103 Maintenance Unit. It stood on display for many years in the Palace Armoury in Valletta.**

**Above: Chief Technician 'Curly' Alcock sits in the cockpit of 'Faith' after its restoration, under his watchful eye, in 1974. It was completed in time to be displayed on Battle of Britain Day outside the RAF Luqa Officers Mess.**

## FIRST MILITARY VEHICLE RALLY

We were fortunate enough to time our visit to Malta in May 1975 to coincide with several important events. One was the first military vehicle rally held on the island on May 24 and later, the opening of the new Malta War Museum on May 30.

Whilst the restoration of military vehicles has been established for some time in the United Kingdom, it is only since the formation of the National War Museum Association, that impetus has been given to vehicle preservation in Malta. In this respect they have been fortunate to have the full backing of the Commander of the Armed Forces of Malta, Brigadier Samut-Tagliaferro, C.B.E.

At this first show, The National War Museum Association brought together thirty-seven vehicles and guns to be displayed in the playground of the Coradino Technical School.

The Armed Forces had on display a 4x4 Artillery Tractor and 1940 vintage 25pdr field gun; a Bofors L70 anti-aircraft gun and two trucks, a 6x6 Kaiser Jeep six-ton Wrecker and a Fiat 4x2 five-tonner.

Malta Film Facilities, who have the largest sea-tank for naval films in Europe at their site at Rinella, displayed five vehicles. Among these were a Dodge Weapons Carrier and Dodge Command Car. A WW2 vintage Bofors gun fitted with post-war fire control and a BSA motor-cyle were also displayed.

Private entries included a 1938 Morris Commercial, (recovered only that morning from a ditch at Zabbar), and three jeeps. (2 Ford GPWs and one Willys) owned by Mr. D. Arrigo, Mr. A. Lautier and ABC Car Rentals. There was a Bedford QL entered by Mr. P. Cachia, an 800-gallon petrol bowser by Mr. N. Fenech whilst Roger Canilleri brought a 6-ton 6x4 Thorneycroft Amazon Crane and a 7½ ton Mack prime mover. Other private entries of veteran and vintage vehicles were allowed to swell the numbers by eleven vehicles.

Stars of the show were a Fordson Thames fire engine, which had been given by the Commissioner of Police for the new War Museum and which had been used at Luqa Aerodrome during WW2. Proceeds from the show were to finance the restoration of a 10hp Austin Saloon, purchased as scrap. It appeared at the show in realistic Malta-style crazed camouflage and was only excelled by the International M5 half-track. Owned by Malta Film Facilities it had been given on permanent loan to the War Museum. The Logistics Unit under Major Busuttil had painstakingly stripped the engine and resprayed it in Sicilian invasion colours as a vehicle of the Ninth Armoured Division, 60th Infantry Brigade, 1st Battalion, A Company, 11th Vehicle in Order of March! It gave us great pleasure to be present at the beginning of what we hope will become an enthusiastic preservation movement.

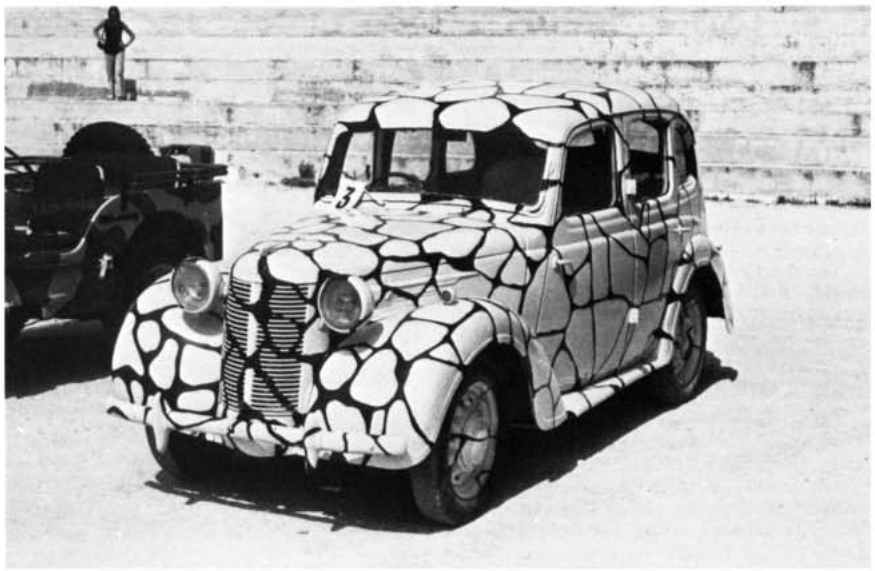
## OPENING OF NEW WAR MUSEUM

The highlight of our visit was the opening of the new National War Museum on Friday, May 30. This has been sited in Fort St. Elmo; the fort whose 6-pdr guns created such havoc with the Italian Naval attack on the harbour.

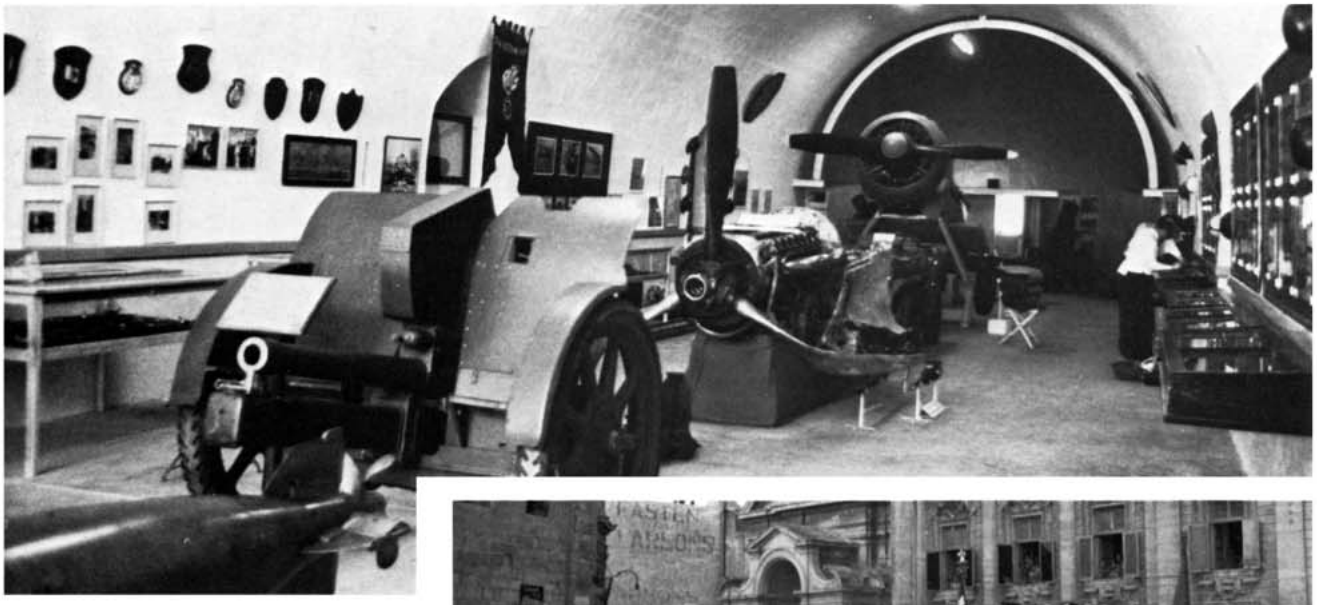
With the right historic surroundings, a large drill hall had been made available for the display. Unfortunately the formation of the museum has come rather late, as no fixed WW2 defences guns or fittings remain in Malta (other than the concrete mountings), and exhibits are now very hard to find. The museum has therefore built its display around the Gladiator 'Faith', installed there after its beautiful restoration at RAF Luqa.

Second in importance must be General Eisenhower's jeep. This was brought over to Malta by Ike in July, 1943 prior to the invasion of Sicily. He used the vehicle whilst in Malta and named it 'Husky' after the code name of the impending invasion. When General Eisenhower moved to Sicily he gave the vehicle to Air Vice-Marshal Park. It was used by

**Above: A WW2 vintage Bofors on display at Corodino School. L-R: Major Eric Busuttil, Logistics Unit; David Spiteri Staines, Malta War Museum; Brigadier A. Samut-Tagliaferro, C.B.E., Commander, Armed Forces of Malta, and the Director of the Museums Department, Malta, Francis S. Mallia.**




**Above: Absolutely in keeping with the Malta scene, this 10hp Austin Saloon has been nicely finished in crazed sand and green Malta-style camouflage. Below: One of the nicely restored jeeps on display.**



**Top: The new National War Museum in Fort St. Elmo. Right: The Italian Terni field-gun (visible in Museum display) being presented to Malta in Castille Square in 1943.**

President Roosevelt during his visit in December 1943, on which occasion he was driven by Flight Sergeant Emanuel Aquilina. When Sir Keith Park relinquished his appointment, the vehicle was presented to the people of Malta. Major Busuttil and his Logistics team have spent a lot of time and effort restoring it to its original condition. It is painted in a grey/blue with the word 'Husky' on the bonnet in white in the original style of lettering.

The field gun presented to Valletta by the Highland Division on October 26, 1943 at a ceremony in Castille Square is also displayed. The gun, a 1917 75mm Vickers Terni, was the first gun captured in the Sicilian Campaign.

## WRECK RECOVERY

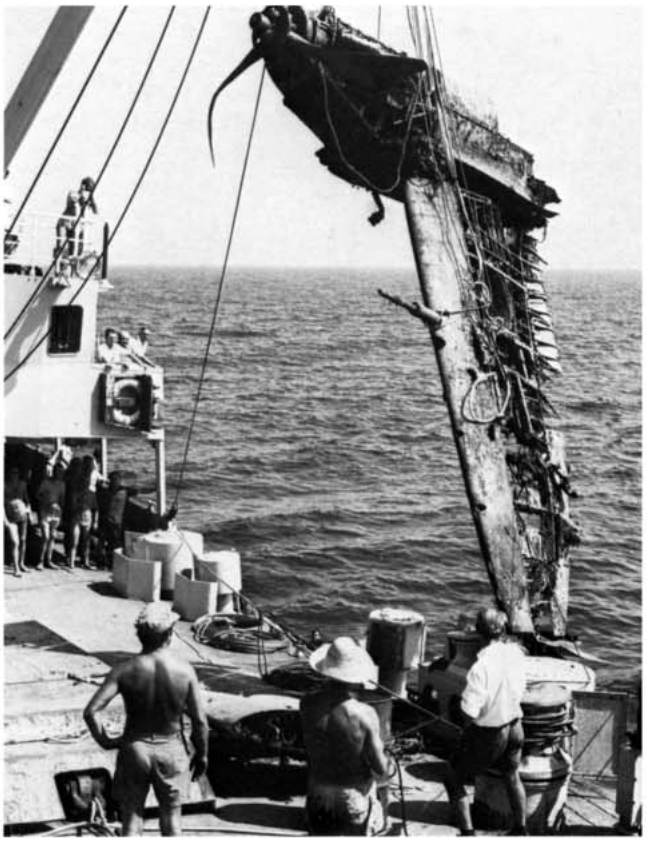
Due importance is given to the wreck recovery angle with the display of the cranked wing spar from a Ju87 which crashed into the harbour and the engine of a Spitfire raised from Marsalforn Bay, Gozo. The Spitfire Vc was ditched by a Canadian pilot, Flight Lieutenant Saunders, early one morning in July 1942, when it was damaged by two Me 109s in a low-level dog-fight around the hills which surround the bay. The aircraft lay in 32ft. of water not one hundred yards from the popular seaside resort.

The Spitfire was raised in 1973. It was evident that souvenir hunters had visited the wreck during the 31 years it lay on the sea bed as the cockpit had been stripped of instruments and fittings. The wings and other aluminium parts were badly corroded and many magnesium parts had completely disintegrated.

Numerous other exhibits are on display from torpedos to small arms depicting life in Malta during the Second World War and this is only the beginning. Since our visit we understand that extensions to the museum are already planned.

The Museum was opened by The Hon. Agatha Barbara, Minister of Labour, Employment and Welfare. After a tour of the exhibits, a lamp-lit supper was held under the stars. We were then treated to an outdoor showing of the Malta episode of the old BBC TV classic 'War in the Air'. There, on the battlements of the historic Fort St. Elmo, thirty-three years later, as the roar of engines, gunfire and bomb-bursts echoed around Grand Harbour, our tour ended on a truly nostalgic note.

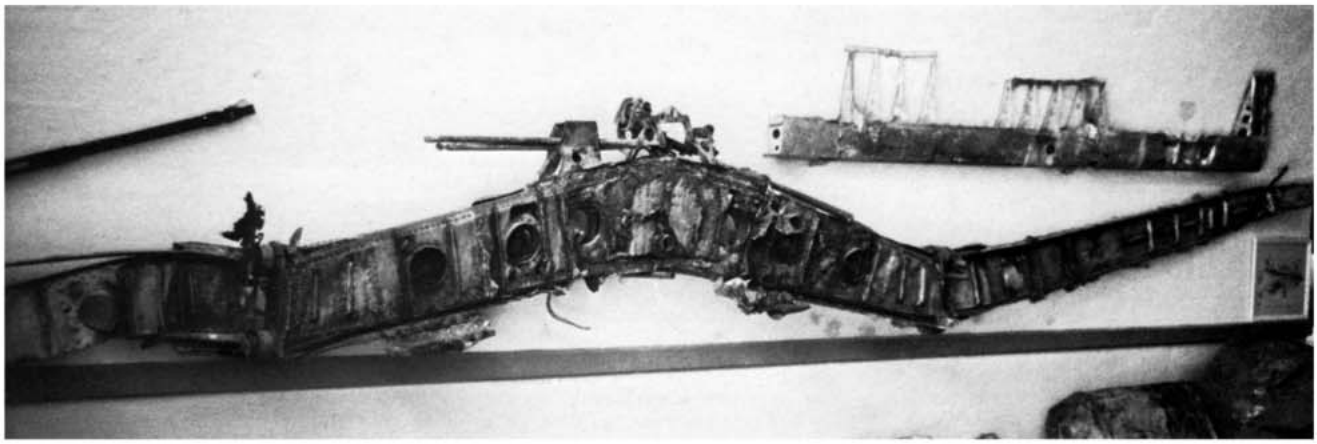
**Above: The Hon. Agatha Barbara examines General Eisenhower's jeep 'Husky' at the opening ceremony. Bottom: 'Husky' and 'Faith'.**



Above: The Spitfire being raised from Marsalforn Bay, Gozo, by an RAF team on which Chief Technician 'Curly' Alcock was technical adviser (Luqa News).

MACHINE GUN BULLET DAMAGE TO
GLYCOL COOLANT SYSTEM WHICH
PROBABLY CAUSED THE AIRCRAFT
TO DITCH AS A RESULT OF ENGINE
OVERHEATING AND SEIZURE

Top: The engine, showing battle damage, on display in the Museum. Above: One of the corroded wings outside the Museum.



Above: The unmistakable cranked wing spar on display from a Junkers 87, believed to have been shot down whilst attacking the Illustrious. The wreckage was moved by the Royal Navy ten years ago but only recently lifted out of Grand Harbour, picture below.

AFTER THE BATTLE

PERSONALITY

# Flight Lieutenant Ian Smith

Ian Smith was born in the small Rhodesian mining town of Selukwe on April 8, 1919. During his schooldays, both at Selukwe and later at the senior co-educational boarding school at Chaplin, the sporting field was his main attraction. Ian Smith remembers that 'I was an absolute lunatic about sport . . . I think I was captain of every team there was in the school and I think did overdo this at the expense of my academic career'. He invariably won the 'Victor Ludorum' award at the annual competitions and in 1937 was captain of the rugby, cricket and tennis teams as well as Head Prefect.

In 1938 he gained entry to Rhodes University where, at the age of nineteen, 'I came to my senses. I suddenly realised there were other things in life besides sport. So I cut some of it out. I realised I was a man on my own'.

By September, 1941, he was finding it more and more difficult to justify the safe comfort of university life; it was almost impossible to keep his nose to the academic grindstone. 'I just couldn't sit back while I saw everybody else going off to fight, and some of my friends had already joined up and they were training here (in Rhodesia) to become pilots', he recalls 'I couldn't stand it any longer'.

The embryonic Southern Rhodesian Air Force had been formed in 1937 with a single squadron: six Hawker Harts bought from the Royal Air Force, augmented a year later by six Hawker Audax biplanes and, later still, by three Gloster Gauntlets. A few days before the outbreak of war in 1939, No 1 Squadron was moved to the Northern Frontier District of Kenya, close to the Abyssinian border. It was, at that time, the only aerial force at the Imperial Command's disposal in the entire East African theatre.

In June 1940, Southern Rhodesian airmen were absorbed into the RAF and the unit became No 237 (Rhodesia) Squadron. By the November of the following year it had fought with some distinction against the Italians in Abyssinia and in the see-saw battles with the Afrika Korps in the Western Desert. It was then transferred to the Persia-Iraq sector of Middle-Eastern Command, in No 214 Group.

At first, when Ian Smith applied to join, the Air Force didn't want him — the Government had exempted students from military duty — so he 'went to the university and told them that I was going and I walked out in the middle of the year'. Within a month he had been accepted as a trainee pilot.

Smith completed his initial training at Guinea Fowl and at Thornhill, near Gwelo, graduating as a Sergeant Pilot in mid-1942, and refined his new skills in Syria, at an airstrip close to the magnificent ruins of Balbeck. He then, as a newly promoted Pilot Officer, No 80463, spent a leisurely few weeks in Palestine before joining No 237 Squadron in Iran.

However by the first week of November 1942 Alamein had been fought and won, and by the time No 237 Squadron returned to the desert in March, 1943, the chase was almost over: what remained of Rommel's forces were caught between the hammer of Montgomery's Eighth Army and the anvil of the Anglo-American First Army in Tunisia, and they would soon have to surrender. The Hurricanes of the Rhodesian squadron moved west with the Desert Rats. On June 16, 1943 whilst flying a Hurricane from an airstrip at Bersis he had to force-land six miles north-east of base with a glycol leak. On July 3, Flying Officer Smith flew the Hurricane to the maintenance unit at Mersa Matruh returning to Bersis two days later in a Walrus. After a time the Squadron was called back to the Canal Zone for reconnaissance and convoy escort duties.

At Idcu, where the squadron was based for much of its term in North Africa, Pilot Officer Smith would fly for two or three hours a day on shipping patrol (the convoys were building up for the invasion of Sicily) and for the rest of the time sit around under canvas, sweltering, swatting at the mosquitoes and the ubiquitous flies, drinking tepid beer, and talking. He recalls vividly 'the long hours together in the desert, in the tents chewing sand and so on, and many hours waiting — pilots on standby in case you were scrambled to intercept and so on.'

At Idcu, No 237 Squadron formed part of the air defence umbrella over Alexandria. When the Italian fleet surrendered in September 1943, and was on its way into harbour, so enemy activity — submarine and air — was expected to intensify. The squadron had just been equipped with new Hurricane IIcs.

Patrols were increased, and security tightened. The pilots were under instruction to maintain radio silence and to keep their navigation lights switched off, which made night-flying, particularly in that blackest hour before dawn, a hazardous operation. 'It was difficult to keep together when you were taking off,' recalls Pilot Officer Alan Smith (one of Smith's fellow pilots), 'so we used to take off one each side of a flare-path. On the morning of October 4, I took off with Ian. Suddenly the glow of his exhaust disappeared. I went on with my mission, and when I got back four hours later I saw four hundred yards of wreckage — radio set, guns and engine. I assumed I would be going to a funeral that afternoon.

An air gunner, George Barclay, just coming off duty, saw the Hurricane's wheels scrape the top of a bank of sandbags built to shield parked aircraft. 'I remember thinking', he says, 'that the poor basket in that has had it.' Barclay shrugged his shoulders and turned away — there was a fire engine and an ambulance on the way, and people were running to help, but 'I was sure there was nothing I could do'.

When they got to Smith they found him lying half in, half out of his machine, almost unconscious.

Rescue crews dragged Smith from the wreckage with his right eye almost out of its socket, the bottom half of his face mangled and one of his legs badly injured. He had snapped his harness, which was designed to take a one-ton stress, and his face had smashed into the plane's instrumental panel.

Vaguely, he heard someone say: 'He'll be

cold meat in a few seconds', but when they lifted him out the cold meat galvanised into action and began flailing its rescuers with its fists. He was in severe shock, and, he says, 'I don't remember a great deal about it'.

Smith's injuries were critical. The squadron MO later told him that had it not been for his exceptional fitness he probably would not have lived.

He was taken to the impressive new 15th Scottish Hospital on the banks of the Nile, opposite Cairo's Zamalek Island, a few days after the smash. There he underwent a series of complex orthopaedic and plastic surgical operations, and the slow process of healing began. He had a tough body, and he was a determined patient.

At the end of 1943 the squadron had been transferred to the Mediterranean island of Corsica, and was now operating against the German forces in Northern Italy and Southern France. It was under American command, and its principal task was to cover American medium bombers — Mitchells and Marauders — on their daily missions over occupied territory. But when the Spitfires weren't on escort duty, says Pilot Officer Alan Smith, they would 'strafe right in the German backyard. We began to chalk up a score against them. The Luftwaffe were not serious opposition at this time'. In fact the German Air Force did strike back, once and very hard. 'We were bombed to hell in Corsica,' one of the squadron's air controllers, Alec Hassan, remembers. 'It was on a little field at Poretta, south of Bastia. Fifty percent of our aircraft were destroyed on the ground by Ju 52s.'

Smith turned up at the Poretta squadron headquarters on May 10, 1944, after a quite remarkable recovery from his injuries. The Rhodesians welcomed back a friend from the dead, there was a celebration, and on May 12 his namesake, Alan, was 'given the job of showing him Italy' now flying a superior Spitfire Mk IX.

The two took off and crossed the Italian coast late in the afternoon, and, says Alan, 'I soon saw that we were back to the same old Smith. He wasn't prepared to just have a look, he wanted to break things as well. He saw a Mercedes staff car going along with five magnificently dressed staff officers in it. They were wearing those peaked hats of theirs and looked as if they were going to a party. He shot them up with pretty terrible results. The car turned upside down, caught fire and nothing moved again. On the way back we saw a tugboat with five barges. I warned him on the radio that the barges were not as innocuous as they seemed. But by this time he was giving them a beat-up and a squirt. Suddenly the covers came off and their guns started up and the two Smiths very nearly ended up in the drink'.

Bomber escort duties and strafing missions followed as the 237 Operations Book records:

**May 13, 1500 hours:** Two aircraft, flown by the CO and F/O I. D. Smith (MH532) with six other aircraft of 251 Wing were airborne on bomber escort.

**May 16, 1445 hours:** Four aircraft, led by F/O I. D. Smith (MK412) escorted 24 B.26s with eight aircraft of 451 Squadron to bomb target at Pontedera.

**May 20, 0825 hours:** F/O I. D. Smith (MJ943) and P/O Douglas strafed M.T. on roads north of Lucca. F/O Smith strafed electric-powered train with six coaches, which was moving out of station. His first burst caused the engine to blow up. Both pilots then strafed three of the coaches, which were full of passengers and F/O Smith strafed a 5-ton truck which went into a ditch and caught fire. He also obtained hits on a red 3-ton bowser which poured liquid but did not ignite. A staff car containing four army types was also badly damaged.

**May 26, 1550 hours:** Eight aircraft led by the CO escorted 20 B.25s attacking bridges at Incisa. Heavy, intense and accurate flak was encountered near the target. F/O I. D. Smith (MK227) and his No 2 P/O J. L. de Wet were detached to investigate an unidentified aircraft. They lost sight of it, but saw two 5-ton trucks which they strafed and damaged. P/O de Wet turned into attack again when he reported that he was hit by flak and was force-landing. He made a successful landing and spoke to his No 1 over the R/T saying that German soldiers were approaching him.

**May 27, 1750 hours:** Eight aircraft, led by F/O I. D. Smith (MK412) escorted 24 B.26s. to bomb road and railway bridges at Ficulle.

**June 5:** (MK412) Obtained three flamers and two damaged.

**June 9:** A staff car and 15-cwt lorry were destroyed by F/O Ian Smith (MJ493) and P/O Aylward. They also damaged another 15-cwt lorry.

**June 13, 0930 hours:** I. Smith (MK227) destroyed a staff car and also a lorry.

**June 14:** F/O Moubray and F/O Smith, I. (MK227) were hit by flak but returned safely.

On June 22, two weeks after the Normandy landings and the fall of Rome, Flying Officer Smith took off from Serragia on a strafing mission over Northern Italy. 'We were strafing trains,' he explains, 'blowing up trains in the Po Valley, and this was our job. It was not very flamboyant — the attraction was always for the chap who managed to shoot down another aeroplane, but that seemed comparatively safe to the people who used to have to do the strafing, because you were right down near the flak on the ground. Most of our work was train-busting and convoy-busting and that sort of thing. So we were strafing trains and I collected flak, a shell from an ack-ack gun, very near the ground. Well, you see, you were comparatively safe if you were up on top. So I had to bail out — it hit my oil sump and my oil went, and I could see my temperature coming up, and the chap who was flying as my Number Two (Alan Douglas) eventually said to me: "Your plane's on fire . . ." So there was only one thing I could do. I stepped out of the thing and landed in the mountains.'

When Squadron Leader J. Walmisley, leading the twelve-plane mission over the

**Above: The wreckage of Hurricane KZ179 upside-down on Idcu aerodrome on October 4, 1943 after the crash in the dark at 5.45 a.m. The subsequent Court of Inquiry found the throttle nut was loose and judged that the pilot raised his wheels too soon. Below: A friend examines the cockpit from which Flying Officer Smith was rescued.**

**Ian Smith stands in the operations room of No. 237 Squadron.**

Alessandra area returned, he filed his report: **June 22, 1630-1830 hours:** One electric train and two vehicles were destroyed and four electric trains, three railway trucks and seven vehicles were damaged. F/O I. Smith said that his aircraft was hit by flak. His aircraft was seen to turn onto its back and burst into flames. The pilot was seen to bale out and land safely, in the mountains north of Spezia.

As soon as he hit ground he hid his parachute in the undergrowth, removed his Wings and badges of rank ('I thought that was the first thing to do') and found a large clump of bushes to lie in 'until I cooled off and got my senses. Then I got out and strolled around, and I could see a little boy with some sheep moving along just down in the valley'.

After a while it occured to him that the Germans would have found his downed Spitfire and would be looking for him, and that his clump of bushes, the biggest on the hillside, was too obvious a hiding place. He crossed to a smaller bush some fifty yards further along. The move almost certainly saved his life. Late in the afternoon he heard dogs barking and saw a German search party coming up the slope towards him. When the soldiers reached his first sanctuary they stopped, challenged and sprayed it with automatic fire.

Nor was this his only piece of luck that day: a local civilian had found and buried his discarded parachute and harness. Had the Germans got to the parachute first, Smith says, 'they might have been able to get my scent. They never did, so the dogs had no scent and they went past me, within a hundred yards . . .'

Meanwhile, the shepherd boy on the slope below had spotted Smith and was watching the drama. When the soldiers had gone he took Smith to his family, 'very poor peasants who lived down in the valley; Vallescura it was called'. They hid him in a cave for a few days until the Germans gave up the hunt, clothed him, fed him.

Shortly afterwards he met a Senor Pesce and his wife, who ran a prosperous millinery business in Genoa and who could afford to maintain a retreat at San Pietro d'Alba, in the mountains above the city. The Pesces offered to take Smith in, but he refused. 'They were already sheltering an escapee, a British Army captain, and I thought they were running too big a risk because their house was almost next door to a German military establishment. So I continued to live in the valley but visited the Pesces occasionally, for short periods. Then one day a group of *partigani* (partisans) passed through Vallescura and I decided to move on with them. I wanted to do something positive, to help their cause'. The group was part of a particularly active anti-Nazi partisan organisation which operated from the nearby village of Moretti Piancastagna.

Smith made contact with the Piancastagna leaders through Fr. Don Beive, the village priest, who took him to the partisan commandante Mingo. Delighted to have an Allied officer with them ('I was like a prize elephant in a circus, you see,' explains Smith. 'If you could have an *Inglese maggiore* along you were a bit better than a gang who didn't'). Mingo immediately promoted him to the rank of major.

The partisan movement was organised along orthodox military lines. Ian Smith's unit, was the Piancastagna Company of the Division Garibaldi 'Ligure-Alessandria'. From October, 1944 it became known as the Division 'Mingo' of the Sixth Operative Force.

The next five months were, he says, 'among the most interesting of my life . . .' His job was to help plan hit-and-run strikes and sabotage operations against German military installations, and, of course, to take part in them as well. For supplies, weapons and ammunition they relied on the Germans. Smith's unit was 'very self-contained. We lived in this little village up in the hills and every now and again we would go along to one of the main roads that ran down over the hills inside the Po Valley, and the Germans used to run these convoys backwards and forwards. Of course, when there was a big convoy there was nothing we could do. But they couldn't always run convoys, and they were supposed to be controlling that country, so now and again there would be an odd, isolated van or truck, and whenever one of these came along we used to stop it.

'We would throw a tree or something similar across the road, and just bump off the driver and his mate and drive the truck back into the hills, and whatever was in it was ours. One day it would be a load of wine, the next day a load of soap, and the next a load of material. I remember on one occasion we got a lot of material — grey, pin-striped material — and we all had nice new suits made, and we were walking around in these pin-striped suits'.

For transport, Smith used a captured German Army staff car. 'We just used to drive around in it . . . It was amazing.'

But when the first snow appeared on the lower slopes of the Alps away to the north, Smith decided that he had had enough. He was 'looking for something new, I think, and I was keen to get out'. He knew that if he didn't make a move soon, he would have to remain at Piancastagna for the whole of the winter, and winter would bring real deprivation. Food had never been plentiful, it would become even less so in the cold months, and the fewer mouths there were to feed the better.

But first he would have to learn Italian. He already had a smattering of the language, enough to make himself understood in the village, but it wouldn't get him through the German lines. His accent was atrocious (it still is, according to a former partisan who recently visited him in Rhodesia), his vocabulary limited, his grammar virtually non-existent. Moreover, his colleagues were loath to see him go, and they did their best to delay his departure. Unless he could pass for a local, they said, 'It will be *pericolosimme* — the Germans would catch me and string me up'. So he borrowed textbooks and a dictionary, and by November he was fluent enough, he believed, to get by.

Smith had since met up with an English corporal, a youngster, known locally as 'Angelo', who had escaped from a prisoner-of-war camp two years before, and together the two of them planned their escape: to trek north over the Alps to the American army in the south of France.

So the two of them began to walk north. Halfway to the border they were joined by three other young escapees — a Frenchman, an Austrian and a Pole.

The group split when they reached the strong German defensive line at the foot of the mountains. There was a viaduct, a railway line and a main road to be crossed, the place was swarming with troops, and a party of five, Smith thought, would be far too conspicuous. He told the three newcomers to lie low and follow on the next day. He and the corporal, after waiting for a German foot patrol to pass, then crossed the barrier and made their way above the snow-line.

Two of the three men they left behind soon caught up with them — the young Pole, 'who only looked about eighteen or nineteen', had lost his nerve and turned back. The cosmopolitan little party now embarked on the last and most difficult leg of its journey.

Smith almost failed to complete the course. Temperatures were sub-zero, he was poorly equipped for the expedition and he did 'a very silly thing,' he recalls. 'My feet were so cold and wet that I took my boots off. We just had to lie down as we were then, and we were only dressed in trousers and shirt, and we tried to sleep — just on ice. It was nothing else but a block of ice. And when it got light the next morning, we woke up and decided to move off before it got really light, and I couldn't put my boots on. Of course they were blocks of ice; I should never have taken them off.

'So I had to walk on in my socks and my socks wore out, and if it hadn't been for that I might not have got frostbite . . .'

But they survived, all four of them, and on the twenty-third day of their odyssey they stumbled down the last French Alpine slopes and into the American lines. Within hours they were in Cannes — bathed, fed, and savouring the exquisite luxury of clean clothes. The ones they had arrived in, says Smith, 'could have walked off us by that stage'!

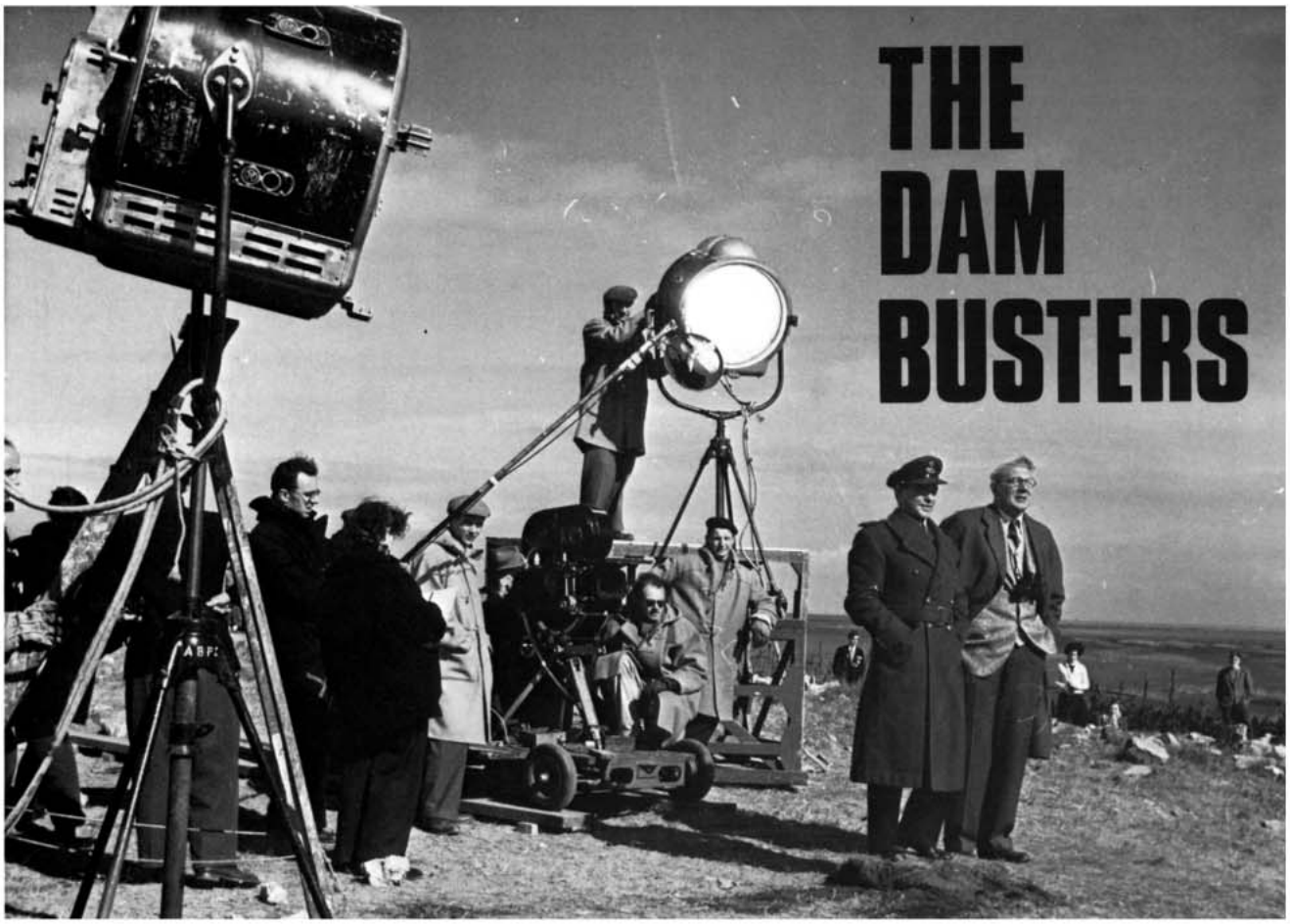
Although Flight Lieutenant Smith could have returned to Rhodesia, he was determined to see the war through and, within a very short time, he was flying again. There was a refresher course at an RAF base in Shropshire, and then missions over Germany and Denmark. His new squadron, No 130, was the first into Norway with the British Liberation Army.

Although hostilities formally ceased on May 8, 1945, there was still a little work to be done. The BLA were methodically cleaning out stubborn pockets of resistance during the rest of the month and 'we used to help them. Whenever the British troops went into a German camp we would fly in over them at roof-top level'.

Finally, the guns fell silent, and Ian Smith spent a 'fabulous' four months in Norway before making the long voyage home to Rhodesia.

The following year Ian Douglas Smith was back at Rhodes University finishing his commerce degree. Then it was into farming and in 1948 — politics. He became Prime Minister of Rhodesia in April 1964.

**Above: Behind enemy lines in 1944, Ian Smith right, with Mrs. Pesce who sheltered him and British escapee, Captain Davis. Below: Today, Prime Minister of Rhodesia.**




'There has never been a picture quite like this or quite as good . . .' So ran part of a review of the Associated British production The Dam Busters after its UK premiere in 1955. Although such film accolades are commonplace, the story of the 1943 RAF raid on the German dams was certainly one of the most convincing recreations of wartime bomber operations, and perhaps it is true to say that it has never been surpassed.

Under the direction of Michael Anderson, the screenplay, adapted by R. C. Sheriff from Paul Brickhill's best-selling story of the attack, was gradually transformed into an authentic piece of screen history. The challenge was considerable.

Initially, copies of the script were sent to surviving members of No 617 Squadron all over the world, to test reaction and ensure that the small but important details would not be overlooked. Thousands of feet of RAF and German film were studied to get the 'feel' of the actual operation, before locations were chosen and casting started.

The film was, in essence, chosen as a launching pad for Richard Todd who needed the success of a major film at that stage in his career. He played the leading role of Wing Commander Guy Gibson VC, with Michael Redgrave playing Dr Barnes Wallis. Richard Todd visited Gibson's home and watched films of the wartime bomber ace, who was killed in 1944, talked to people who had known him and noted his personal characteristics. Barnes Wallis willingly co-operated with the film crew, both in turning Redgrave into his 'double' and observing takes as shooting progressed.

Locations for The Dam Busters included the wartime home of No 617 Squadron at RAF Scampton in Lincolnshire, beaches at Skegness, the National Physical Laboratories at Teddington, Lake Windermere and dams in the Sheffield district. The film crew even unearthed the actual wartime No 5 Group

**Top: Richard Todd and Michael Redgrave watching the full scale tests of the bomb. The film at this stage showed a Mosquito dropping a 'Highball' weapon, a smaller version of the bomb for use against shipping. Above: The crew prepare to board Lancaster NX673.**

Headquarters at Grantham, which had long since been converted into flats for service families. By chance, a caretaker remembered a large underground room that had not been opened as long as anyone could remember. Once inside, the old ops room was found to be almost as it had been left at the end of the war and the team were able to build an exact replica at Elstree Studios.

Small items that by 1955 were a mere memory of wartime austerity — the blackout, air raid shelters, white-painted kerbstones, dimmed street lamps and so on, all had to be brought back to life, helped by the reminiscences of many private individuals, as well as the RAF and Air Ministry. Technical adviser for the film was Group Captain Charles Whitworth, DSO, DFC, who commanded No 617 at the time of the raid.

Other members of the famous unit, including Dave Shannon, Micky Martin and Air Vice-Marshal The Hon Sir Ralph Cochrane, were called upon to help cast actors as themselves.

Early shooting was carried out at the National Physical Laboratories at Teddington, where No 2 Ship tank, which Wallis had virtually taken over in 1942 to conduct exhaustive trials of his invention, was used. Wallis himself, accompanied by members of his family, went along to watch these scenes being shot and their verdict on the reconstruction was favourable, much to the relief of the director!

There followed three weeks of shooting at Scampton in May — 11 years to the actual month of the raid. Luckily, the real stars of the film, four Avro Lancaster Mk VIIs, were still available at that time. The aircraft, NX679, '673 and '782 and RT686, were collected from the maintenance unit at Hemswell and painted up to represent No 617's 1943 machines.

Details of the exact shape of the Barnes Wallis bouncing mine, were not released until 1963, so the film crew had to make an educated guess as to its shape. In the event, the screen bomb resembled a giant cheese, much larger and hanging further below the Lancasters' bomb bay than the cylindrical 'dustbin' shape of the real thing.

Air-to-air filming of the Lancasters was carried out from a suitably modified Vickers Varsity trainer. The standard metal floor of the aircraft was replaced by wood, into which the camera mount was fixed. Cameras also occupied the port cockpit seat, the pilot's position being moved to starboard. The Varsity's perspex nose was removed to take the camera lens and other shots were made from the open rear door.

All the Lancaster crews for the film came from RAF Lincoln squadrons led by Ken Souter, an ex-fighter pilot, their skill in positioning the big bombers for the best takes was dramatically evident in the finished film. Great credit must go to the aircraft crews, who co-operated magnificently with the film men and made the latter's job as easy as possible. The work was sometimes uncomfortable and occasionally dangerous, but all concerned were enthusiastic about the project and were determined to get it right.

There were some lighter moments, especially when the crew were shooting scenes at Scampton. Actors mingled with the service personnel and those playing officers were constantly saluted by real other ranks, until they felt it best to accept the situation rather than take time explaining. And of course, the inevitable happened. Walking across the airfield one day, Group Captain Whitworth was passed by two aircraftmen who seemed uncertain whether to salute or not. They were soon enlightened.

'Don't you know a real Group Captain when you see one?' he shouted.

As well as the flying sequences, there was much studio work to be done at Elstree. Mock-ups of the Lancaster cockpit were built

**Above: Preparing to shoot a cockpit scene at Scampton. Below: Michael Anderson, the director, places the actors for the scene where Guy Gibson meets the assembled 617 Squadron for the first time.**

and Richard Todd and other members of the cast sweated it out under the arc lights. As many people will recall, these scenes were particularly good, hardly looking as though back projection was being used for scenery outside the 'aircraft'.

Beach scenes at Skegness were sometimes hampered by holiday makers, who turned up in force to watch the shooting of the early test drops of the bouncing bomb, when Michael Redgrave walked onto the mud flats to recover pieces of the broken bomb casing. It was in these scenes that some documentary footage was slotted in, showing the dropping of some of the first test bombs. The 'real thing' is also seen earlier in the film when Redgrave, accompanied by Patrick Barr as 'Mutt' Summers, takes off in a Wellington to put Wallis's theories into action. The Wellington had become very scarce by 1955 and the film clip

shown is that taken to record the actual experimental flights, featuring the Wellington used in 1942-43.

It is interesting to note that the same apparatus used by Wallis to test his theories in 1942 was still in existence when the film was made, so the opening scenes, where Redgrave shoots marbles across a tub of water representing the Mohne Lake, made use of the equipment once again. This catapult is now on display at the RAF Museum at Hendon. At Teddington, the powerful catapult used to fire balls across the surface of the testing tank was, again, the one built by Wallis and his team in 1942.

With only four Lancasters available, a certain amount of 'doubling up' had to be done with paint to give the impression of numbers. Gibson's aircraft, ED932/G, was played by NX679, with its new identity on one side only, while NX782 was also marked with the code letters 'ZN-G', to represent his No 106 Squadron Lancaster, which he flew before joining 617.

Besides the two main characters, The Dam Busters cast included Bill Kerr as Flight Lieutenant Micky Martin, DSO, DFC, AFC, Derek Farr as Group Captain Whitworth and Basil Sydney as Air Chief-Marshal Sir Arthur 'Bomber' Harris, GCB, OBE, AFC. One actor who played his part without any trouble was the black Labrador that doubled as Gibson's dog 'Nigger' — he was rated a director's dream playing his part exactly as the script demanded.

Filming the Dam Busters took some ten months. Shooting was completed in mid-July 1954 and its subsequent success is well known. It has been around the cinema circuits innumerable times and appeared on television. Many aviation clubs and films societies have featured it on their film nights, and to the aviation enthusiast, it never seems to loose its appeal. Few British pictures of its genre can have made more money for the studio that created them, but the painstaking attention to detail evident throughout is deserving of every penny.

J. C. SCUTTS

*Helmuth Euler, who assisted us with information and photographs from his extensive personal collection, for our story in After the Battle No 3 on the Dams' Raid, has now completed his own book on the attack and its aftermath. This was published in Germany earlier this year titled 'Als Deutschlands Damme brachen' and is published by Motorbuch Verlag, 7 Stuttgart 1, Postfach 1370 priced DM 28. Although the text is in German, the hundred photographs, which are included, alone make Herr Euler's account a must for those interested in this unique raid.*

**Above: The sad scene at the end of the film where Gibson is told by his batman that 'Nigger' has been killed. Note the chalk marks for the exact positioning of the actors' feet.**

**Right: The main drive at Scampton past the Officers' Mess, on the right, where the real Guy Gibson briefed the pilots before the raid. Below left: Between takes — Richard Todd with Patrick Barr, who portrays Mutt Summers. Below right: Getting it right!**

# 1975 Sequel...

In *After the Battle No.3* in our story on the Dams Raid we mentioned the existence of several of the concrete-filled practice bombs still lying on the foreshore at Reculver. Peter Cornish, the National Coach for the British Sub Aqua Club, East Anglian area, and one of the leading experts in underwater wreck recovery (who has already featured in two of our wreck stories), passed this information to the Rayleigh branch of the BSAC at a lecture in March 1974. In April one of the members, Malcolm Ilott, decided to investigate. This is his story:

One day in April, I was out in a friend's boat. We were at the Red Sands Fort at the mouth of the Thames *(See After the Battle No 4)* and I suggested to the skipper, Rodney Allington, that we should go and have a look at the bombs. He agreed and we made our way to Reculver to inspect. They were in very good condition and I thought that it would be a shame just to leave them there so I mentioned it to the committee who agreed to take it on as a project.

On April 25, 'Buster' Kingston, our Honorary Secretary at that time, wrote to the RAF Museum, The Imperial War Museum and The Battle of Britain Museum to see whether they were interested in having one of these fine specimens. They were all interested, so we went to work on different methods of lifting to find the easiest way to execute the raising of the bombs. We all decided that the method that we would use would involve thirty-two 46 gallon oil drums and about one ton of scaffolding. We got in touch with the Mobil Oil Company who gave thirty-two oil drums to the club, also Scaffolding (G.B.) Ltd. who supplied all the scaffolding. We gathered all the equipment together and set off for Reculver in a lorry supplied by Property Mastics Ltd.

We arrived at Reculver late one Friday night. We unloaded the lorry about a mile from the actual site, and therefore had engines, boats, a ton of scaffolding and 32 oil drums to shift manually at five o'clock the next morning to the site. About 7.30 a.m. Saturday, two other members of the club turned up and we started work on erecting the scaffolding to make the frame. We finished three sections by Saturday night. On Sunday, more club members arrived and we finished the raft, but by then we had run out of time, so we had to postpone it until the next Spring tide a fortnight later.

Two weeks later we completed making the raft and secured it to a bomb by putting straps around it and securing it with the chain at the top of the straps. The chain went up through the centre of the raft and was then shackled to the scaffolding and, with the tide rise, it lifted the bomb off the sea-bed. The unfortunate part was that there was not enough time to get it clear of the sand bank and, after further efforts, we had to abandon the idea of using the raft.

I then got in touch with No 33 Squadron, RAF at Odiham and Flying Officer Holloway came to Reculver one weekend to have a look at the bomb. He said that it was much too heavy for the Puma to lift but the American Air base had a Sikorsky HH53, the 'Jolly Green Giant', which could lift two bombs at a time if necessary. I contacted Major Gates of the 67th Squadron, USAF, stationed at Woodbridge, and arranged a meeting. At the meeting, we fixed the date for the lift; Monday, April 28, 1975. It had taken one year from the time of starting to the time of execution and, by this time, I had made another three sets of straps for the remaining three bombs and had also made a loop out of chain for the actual lifting.

The RAF requested that a Jate team should be present. This is a special team for making sure that a load is secure before it is lifted by a helicopter to avoid any accident occurring. The Jate team arrived at Reculver early on April 28, inspected the bombs and were satisfied that our method was safe although they decided they we should use one of their own strops for the actual lift. They connected their strop to our chain and when the helicopter came in on a low pass, we hooked up to the 'Jolly Green Giant' and started the lift. Suddenly, something broke, and the strap went straight up to the helicopter. My immediate thought, 'Was it my straps and chain or was it the RAF strop?' It turned out that unfortunately there had been a misinterpretation on the weight factor and the Jate team thought the bombs only weighed 6,600 lbs. This was, in fact, only the payload of the bomb and did not take into account the steel-casing which increased the weight to 9,250 lbs. At the time, the strain gauge in the helicopter read 11,000 lbs. before the chain actually snapped!

On the second attempt, we made up a double strop and lifted the bomb that had been previously raised by the floatation method with the oil drums.

The helicopter returned to its landing platform in the middle of a nearby field and we had a briefing with the outcome that, as the USAF was running out of fuel, they would return the next day. Sure enough, promptly at 8.00 a.m. the next day, the 'Jolly Green Giant' arrived at Reculver. This time they brought with them an enormous shackle. This was before the Jate team had arrived and by 9.30 a.m., the USAF had lifted three more bombs.

The bombs were then transported to the Brenzett Aeronautical Museum, Romney Marsh (*see After the Battle No 4*), the RAF Museum, Hendon, the Imperial War Museum and a private collector in Wickford, Essex.

**Top: Thirty-four years after they were dropped, the Sikorski HH53 prepares to lift one of the bombs. Below: After a year's planning, all smiles, Malcolm Ilott stands beside the five-ton concrete-filled monster.**

AFTER THE BATTLE

## WRECK RECOVERY

# The Battle of Britain Museum

Although there is a relatively large number of groups and individuals which engage in the now familiar occupation of 'Wreck Recovery', few can boast an established museum to rival that of the Battle of Britain Museum at Chilham Castle, Kent.

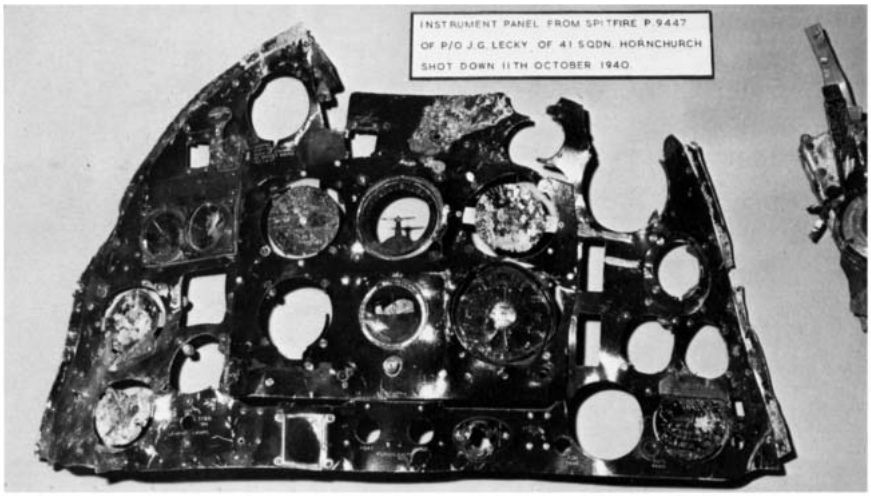
As its name implies, the group concentrates on recovering relics of the Battle fought over the Kent countryside in the summer of 1940, and has now investigated over 500 crash sites during the past nine years. In the majority of cases all that is left of the aircraft is the engine and a large number of twisted scraps of aluminium, but occasionally a larger section comes to light. Striking examples include a complete Spitfire wing and the tail section of a Messerschmitt Bf109.

The Battle of Britain Museum owes its existence to a chance encounter on a Thames Estuary mudflat between a diver and a pile of twisted metal. Early in 1966, Mr. Alfred Llewellyn, a Port of London helmet diver, was working in one of the shipping lanes of the Thames Estuary in search of a sunken yacht when he came across a wrecked Spitfire resting on a mudbank exposed by low tide. He mentioned this chance find to his son Michael who was fascinated by the possibility that tangible relics of a great battle for national survival were still to be found scattered about the countryside more than twenty-five years after the event.

The incident fired Michael Llewellyn's imagination and he attempted to relocate the wreck but without success. Undeterred, he sought out similar wrecks and began researching the subject of aircraft losses and casualties in depth. Gradually he gathered together a group of like-minded enthusiasts to recover surviving relics of British and German aircraft lost in combat over southern England during 1940.

One of the characteristics of the group is the amount of archive material which they have collected over the years and which is used to pinpoint and identify crash sites before a dig is made. These records enable the group to decide if the wreck may contain live ammunition or bombs, or indeed the remains of the crew, in which case a dig will not be undertaken. Typical of the archive material is the large collection of period newspapers and cuttings as well as a priceless collection of Combat Reports which were rescued from destruction a few years ago and now give highly accurate reports of the events of thirty-five years ago.

A typical example of the depth of the research is that for Hurricane V7437 of No. 310 (Czech) Sqdn, RAF, shot down on 7 September 1940. The aircraft was being flown at the time by Joseph Koukal, a Czech fighter



pilot who had seen service with both the Czech and French air forces before escaping to England where he joined the RAF. He is credited with the destruction of six Messerschmitts whilst serving with the French and was no stranger to combat when he took off from Duxford in the afternoon of September 7. At some time during the evening he lost contact with the rest of his Wing and seeing a group of friendly aircraft he tagged along with them and headed for the Sheppey-Gravesend area.

Koukal bagged a Messerschmitt but was then himself hit whilst flying at about 20,000 ft. One fuel tank exploded instantly, covering the cockpit in a sheet of flame. The unfortunate Koukal was drenched in burning fuel as he struggled to overcome the G-forces pinning him in his seat. The interior of the aircraft was like a blast-furnace, the flames being fanned by the slipstream from the open canopy—Koukal preferred to fly with the canopy open, even though this was against regulations, as he had been used to flying in open-cockpit biplane fighters.

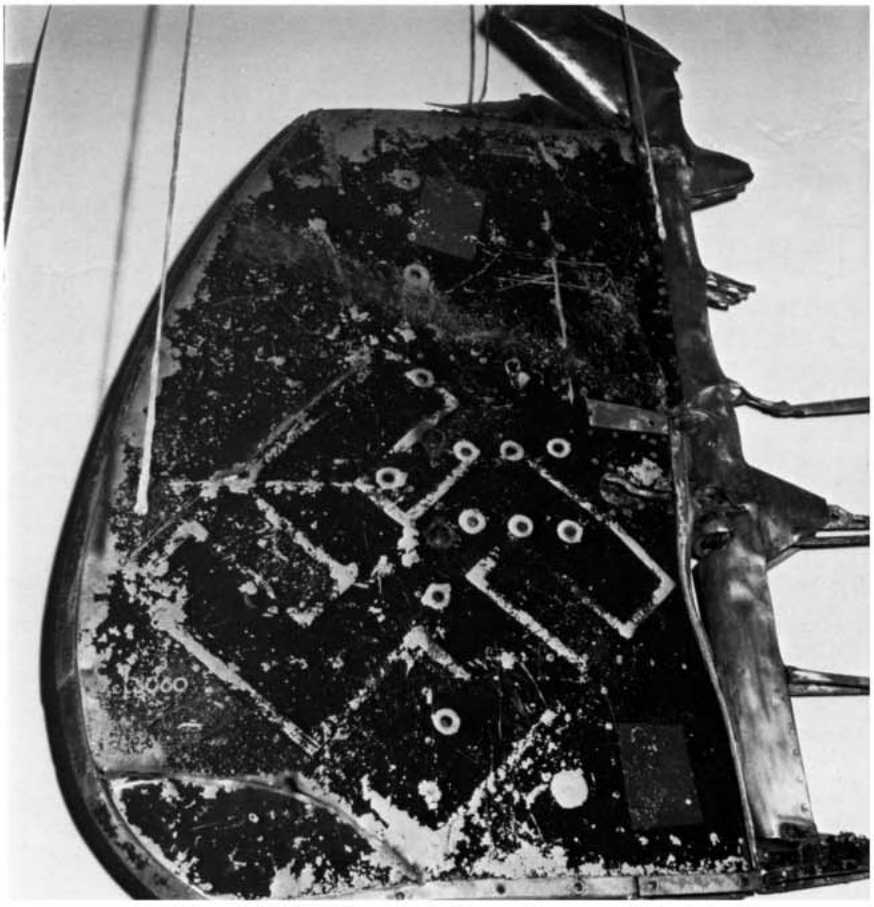
As the Hurricane plunged through 13,000 ft. the second fuel tank blew up and Koukal was blasted free. Even though he was in severe pain from his burns he had the presence of mind to wait a few moments before pulling the ripcord. This enabled the wind to extinguish his burning clothes which would otherwise have ignited his parachute. He landed at Sheppey and crawled half a mile in search of help before collapsing in the arms of a farmer and his wife who arranged for an ambulance to take him to hospital.

On arrival it was discovered that he had suffered burns to 70% of his body and he was kept in hospital for 30 months before being discharged. During this time he underwent 21 operations involving skin grafts taken from his left buttock—the only part of his body not burnt. He was the first of Sir Archibald McIndoe's 'Guinea Pigs' and following his complete recovery he returned to active service flying Spitfires from 1943 onwards.

When the Museum had located the wreck of his Hurricane, Koukal was invited to inspect the remains. He visited the museum in September 1972 where he met the farmer's wife who had helped him and he was presented with a piece of his Hurricane.

This story is typical of those attached to all the relics now displayed in the museum. Some of the parts recovered are from aircraft which were being flown by such famous pilots as Peter Townsend, Robert Stanford Tuck, Tom Gleave, Al Deere and William Rhodes-Moorehouse. Other components are known to have come from aircraft shot down by renowned Luftwaffe aces such as Adolf Galland and Werner Molders.

The Battle of Britain Museum has already outgrown one home in the grounds of a retired Squadron Leader's home at Langley in Kent, and cannot show all of its collection at Chilham owing to lack of space. However, all proceeds from opening the collection to the public and the sale of souvenirs is ploughed back in the hope that one day a purpose-built museum building can be erected to house the whole collection, aircraft included. Meanwhile the museum provides 'a humble and sincere tribute to all airmen who fought and died in the skies of Southern England during 1940'.



# The Essex Historical Aircraft Society – Thirty-fifth Anniversary excavation

**Top: Sergeant Frantisek Marek's grave at Eastwood End Cemetery, in the shadow of the derelict Hornchurch aerodrome, on the outskirts of London. The date on the gravestone states that he died on September 16, 1940; there is no doubt that this is incorrect. This is not an unknown occurrence during a period when the Air Ministry was under extreme pressure. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission has since arranged to correct their records and the headstone.**

In recent years members of Essex Historical Aircraft Society have been responsible for the excavation of numerous World War II aeroplane crash sites in the Essex area. One of the most interesting excavations was carried out recently, when the remains of a Battle of Britain Spitfire aircraft were recovered at Horndon-on-the-Hill, near Orsett, Essex. The dig on this site proved not only interesting but also virtually unique as it was planned to take place on the 35th Anniversary of the crash.

It was on Saturday, September 14, 1940 that the crash occurred. A little after 4.00 p.m. on that afternoon, a formation of No. 19 Squadron Spitfires were climbing in a southerly direction over the Orsett area when one aircraft, a Spitfire I, serial number R6625, fell out of formation and entered into an ever-steepening dive, the pilot apparently powerless to recover control of the machine.

At 4.20 p.m. the stricken Spitfire, completely out of control, crashed in open countryside about 1½ miles west of Horndon-on-the-Hill and ripped into the Essex soil with incredible violence, bringing down a set of telephone lines and damaging a bungalow.

The remains of the pilot, Frantisek Marek, a 27-year-old Czechoslovakian Sergeant Pilot on temporary detachment with No. 19 Squadron from No. 310 (Czech) Squadron, were found in the shattered wreckage and subsequently buried at Eastbrook End Cemetery in East London. The crash was believed to have been caused by the pilot losing consciousness due to anoxia (lack of oxygen) at high altitude.

Sunday, September 14, 1975 dawned a dismal, blustery day with a forecast of torrential rain but, despite the atrocious meteorological conditions, members of Essex Historical Aircraft Society were determined to excavate the wreck of Spitfire R6625 on the exact anniversary. After having carefully prepared the site by sealing the field to the public and roping off an area in which recovered items could be safely placed, excavation began in earnest with the aid of a mechanical excavator hired from the landowner.

At a depth of 2ft the excavator unearthed the first of many large sections of compressed airframe, one of which was later found to have the aircraft serial number stencilled on it. These sections were in surprisingly good condition revealing few signs of corrosion. Immediately below these sections came the first major 'find', a propellor blade, together with parts of the radiator.

Then further sections of fuselage and two large pieces of wing spar came to light, and at a depth of 5ft, the propellor boss with two blades still attached. One of the blades was in remarkable condition, the black paint and yellow tip being clearly visible. As this item was being lifted from the hole, a main wheel undercarriage oleo leg became visible and was recovered, together with further fuselage and wing parts, including some extensive remains of the main spar.

Next finds of interest were two oxygen bottles, still grouped together, and immediately below these came the rear cockpit armour-plating, followed by the remains of the cockpit itself. At this point, excavation work became painstakingly cautious, not wanting to miss any smaller items. Numerous parts were found in the cockpit area including the oxygen regulator, gun sight, rudder pedals and various instruments.

At a depth of 8ft, the forward bulkhead and fuel tank were uncovered. By this stage the excavation reeked of engine fluids—oil, glycol and petrol—and a film of oil was forming on water that had collected at the bottom of the crater. From this it was obvious that the remains of the Rolls Royce Merlin engine lay immediately below. At a depth of 10ft, the tangled and smashed remains of the Merlin were uncovered and lifted from the crater.

In the late afternoon, after having ascertained that no further aircraft remains were present, the task of backfilling and reinstating the land to its former condition was completed.

The next morning, the wreckage of the Spitfire was transported to Essex Historical Aircraft Society premises for storage and restoration.

**Left: A good illustration of the atrocious conditions faced by the group on their dig.**

Aircraft wreck excavation has now become so widespread, with groups operating all over the country, that the Ministry of Defence issued a note of guidance to recovery groups in March 1975. It was inevitable that some form of official control would be instituted, especially after the considerable interest and press coverage following some recent finds.

The following groups are actively involved with the investigation and excavation of aircraft wreck sites and, as well as these, there are of course, numerous ATC squadrons engaged in wreck recovery plus the activities of various branches of the British Sub-Aqua Club.

Aircraft Preservation Society of Scotland,
Secretary:
36 Bryce Road,
Currie,
Midlothian. EH14 5LW.

Aviation Archaeologists' Association
Preservation Group,
Secretary: David Star[illegible]field, Esq.,
School House, Sharneyford, Bacup,
Lancs. OL13 9UQ.

Battle of Britain Museum,
Home Farm,
Chilham Castle, Chilham, Nr. Canterbury,
Kent. CT4 8DB.

Brenzett Aeronautical Museum,
Secretary: N. K. Ford, Esq.,
Park Farm Cottage,
Biddenden,
Kent.

Derby Historical Aviation Society,
Secretary: Peter Felix, Esq.,
8 Edale Close,
Allestree,
Derby. DE3 2RL.

Essex Aviation Group,
Secretary: S. Brett, Esq.,
14 Amyruth Road,
Brockley, London SE4 1HQ.

Essex Historical Aircraft Society,
Chairman: F. R. Dunn, Esq.,
21 Sussex Road,
Brentwood,
Essex.

London Air Museum,
Secretary: Al Brown, Esq.,
46A Lower Higham Road,
Gravesend, Kent.

North East Vintage and Veteran Aircraft
Association,
Secretary:
43 Glamis Avenue,
Melton Park, Gosforth,
Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Scotland West Aircraft Investigation Group,
Secretary: John Martindale, Esq.,
10 Devon Drive,
Bishopton, Renfrewshire. PA7 5EG.

Snowdonia Aviation Historical Group,
Secretary: Arthur W. Evans, Esq.,
'Cynlas', High Street,
Llanberis,
Caernarvon,
N. Wales.

Solway Aviation Society,
Secretary: J. Huggon, Esq.,
10 Percy Road,
Carlisle CA2 6ES.

Stratford Aviation and Militaria Enthusiasts,
Secretary: Peter Summerton, Esq.,
27 West Street,
Stratford-upon-Avon,
Warks.

The Warplane Wreck Investigation Group,
Secretary: G. P. Croman, Esq.,
78 Andover Crescent,
Winstanley,
Wigan,
Lancashire.

The Wealden Aviation Archaeological Group,
Secretary: A. R. Saunders, Esq.,
20 Ersham Road,
Hailsham,
Sussex. BN27 3LD.

## Ministry of Defence crashed military aircraft of historical interest—note of guidance to recovery groups

1. One result of the growing public interest in the history of aviation, and the Second World War in particular, is that a number of groups have been formed to recover, preserve and exhibit some of the military aircraft which crashed during the war and have never been recovered. The level of activity is such that it is considered necessary to issue this Note of Guidance on matters which are of particular concern to the MOD.

**Ownership of aircraft and equipment**

2. Crashed British military aircraft and their equipment remain the property of the MOD. Crashed enemy aircraft and their equipment lying within the UK are regarded as captured enemy property which has been surrendered to the Crown. For all practical purposes the MOD could exercise the right to possession of both categories and would deal with any question arising on them.

**Permission to recover**

3. Any recovery group wishing to recover the wreckage of a military aircraft should first approach the MOD to obtain their consent as owner. Consent will normally be given, subject to the various requirements contained in this Note and to the condition that the work will be carried out in a responsible manner. Consent may be withheld, however, in cases where the MOD wishes to make its own arrangements for the recovery and/or preservation of an aircraft. Consent must be obtained with respect to each and every recovery operation, and groups should note that the MOD is not prepared to grant sole rights of recovery to any one group for any one site.

4. Any failure to follow the guidance given in this Note will result in a recovery becoming an unlawful interference with Crown property and could lead to civil or criminal proceedings. In this respect particular attention is drawn to para 8 concerning firearms, ammunition and explosives, and to para 9 concerning human remains.

**Entry on to land**

5. In all cases the permission of landowners and occupiers should be obtained before any recovery project is undertaken. Once permission has been granted, full liaison should be maintained with the landowner or occupier in order to ensure the minimum of inconvenience and damage to property.

**Wreckage lying in coastal waters**

6. Groups wishing to recover aircraft lying in coastal waters are advised that, in addition to approaching the MOD, as laid down in this Note, they must also contact the local Receiver of Wreck, who is ultimately responsible for determining the ownership of any such aircraft.

**Safety precautions**

7. Recovery operations should not commence until adequate safety precautions, commensurate with the dangers likely to be encountered, have been taken. For example, if an aircraft lies on a former bombing or gunnery range, or if the presence of any firearms, ammunition or explosives is suspected, expert advice should be sought from the police of any Service unit (*see* also para 8).

**Firearms, ammunition and explosives**

8. The MOD specifically reserves its rights in respect of firearms, ammunition and explosives. The possession of these articles is subject to strict control under the Firearms Act 1958 and the Explosives Act 1875, and any person having unauthorized possession of them would commit an offence. The finding of firearms, ammunition and explosives should be notified immediately to the police. This applies in all cases irrespective of the condition of the items found, and recovery work is to cease until the items have been removed by properly authorized persons and the site declared safe.

**Human remains**

9. In many cases crews will have escaped from aircraft before they crashed, but there is still a possibility of human remains being found. These must not be touched, and they should be treated with due respect. Their discovery must be reported immediately to the police and recovery activities must be suspended until the human remains have been removed. The feelings of relatives of deceased aircrew cannot be emphasized too strongly. Irreverent handling of human remains would be particularly distressing to them, and it is most important that no information about the discovery of human remains should be given to relatives or the news media until the facts have been properly confirmed. A coroner's inquest may have to be held. The MOD will take all the necessary steps to notify the next-of-kin or other relatives, and in no circumstances is a recovery group to act in this respect.

**Personal property**

10. Items might be found in wreckage which were the personal property of crew members. These must be handed to the police or any Service unit.

**Books, documents and papers**

11. All books, documents and papers found during excavation, whether official or personal crew property, must be reported to the MOD, who will then decide which items, if any, may be retained by the group in question.

**Retention of recovered items**

12. The MOD has no objection to the retention by groups of items they recover other than those which are specifically prohibited in this Note and provided that prior MOD consent to the recovery has been obtained.

**Legal responsibilities**

13. It must be clearly understood that the MOD will not under any circumstances accept any responsibility whatsoever for any consequences arising from the activities of recovery groups, for example compensation for injury to any persons or damage to property. This Note is not therefore to be construed as an authority from the MOD to recover aircraft, but rather as a guide to the circumstances under which the MOD may consent to an application for recovery. Groups are urged to consider their position before embarking upon a project.

**Adverse publicity**

14. The MOD is concerned that the Services should not become involved in any adverse publicity as a result of any recovery activities. Groups are requested to take all possible steps to prevent this.

**US military aircraft**

15. Any enquiries concerning the investigation or recovery of US military aircraft of historical interest are to be directed in the first instance to the MOD, who will then contact the appropriate US authorities. Groups are warned that such enquiries will be treated on a case by case basis and no action is to be taken on site until the appropriate authority has been received.

**Application and enquiries**

16. Any applications or enquiries regarding any recovery operations covered by this Note should be addressed to:

Ministry of Defence
S4c(Air)
Metropole Building
Northumberland Avenue
London WC2N 5BL

"Faith"
N5520